

Strategic Integrated Planning Deconstruction - Nike “Winning isn’t for everyone”

Kajal Reddy Padi

USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

PR 508: Public Relations and Advertising Fundamentals and Strategy

Professor Dotty Diemer

September 22, 2025

Strategic Integrated Planning (SIP) Model

I. Background

Nike stands as one of the world's most powerful brands in the world. People know it not only for its innovative products but also for its iconic branding and effective advertising campaigns. It all started in 1962, when Phil Knight, a former track athlete, visited Japan's Onitsuka factory. Impressed by the shoes' quality, he brought them to the U.S. Knight and his former track coach, Bill Bowerman, soon founded Blue Ribbon Sports and debuted their first shoe, the Tiger Cortez (Carlson, 2024).

In 1971, Blue Ribbon Sports rebranded, giving birth to the brand Nike and its now iconic logo. Bowerman's mission was simple and clear: to make better athletic shoes. The goal resulted in innovations like the waffle shoe and the cushioned midsole (Nike, 2024). Today, Nike offers a wide range of products, including sports gear, accessories, apparel, and athletic footwear.

Nike didn't just dominate the world of sports but also integrated itself into society and culture. By collaborating with famous athletes like Tiger Woods, LeBron James, etc., it told stories of grit, dedication, and ambition. Nike has a reputation for taking risks, even when some of its decisions spark controversy, such as the campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick. It is precisely that boldness that allows the company to remain relevant with its audience. (Carlson, 2024). Nike has recently branched out into sports technology, flagship stores, and specialized product lines such as NikeLab and Nike ACG (All Conditions Gear).

II. Mission Statement

Nike's ultimate goal is *to bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world*, with the belief that if you have a body, you are an athlete (Nike, 2025). Nike exists to serve athletes, drive creativity, and push the future of sport, focusing on:

- Ensuring every Nike employee and future talent has the tools and support to succeed.
- Redefining sport for the next generation, allowing the youth to play and reach their full potential.
- Innovating and implementing eco-friendly initiatives to help protect the planet.
- Promoting a transparent and responsible supply chain to support thriving communities.

III. Brand Positioning

Nike presents itself as the go-to brand for anyone wanting to succeed in sports and in life. It has become a symbol of inspiration, performance, and style through effective emotional branding and marketing (Wu, 2022).

To: Athletes and individuals striving to achieve greatness

Brand is the: leading athletic and lifestyle brand that delivers performance, style, and empowerment

That: helps people reach their full potential while expressing their identity

Because: Nike's innovative products and effective campaigns inspire and empower individuals to perform their best on and off the field, while also caring about culture, community, and the environment

IV. Statement of Problem or Opportunity

Nike has long built its brand around empowerment, inclusivity, and athletic excellence. However, the company faced a combination of market challenges—including high competition from Adidas, Hoka, and emerging sportswear brands, as well as declining sales in key regions. It needed to reassert its position as a leader in quality athletic products. Nike launched its “Winning Isn’t for Everyone” campaign right before the Paris Olympics, featuring athletes such as LeBron James and Serena Williams. It aimed to celebrate victory and

highlight the mindset of athletes. However, the campaign faced backlash when it was perceived as elitist and narrow-minded.

People argued that the slogan and tone of the campaign contradicted the Olympic spirit, which has always advocated for inclusivity, team spirit, and the idea that mere participation is valuable. The campaign's focus on winning as the sole measure of success excluded many who felt that sports should be about self-growth and community, not just elite achievement (Danziger, 2024).

The ad seemed to emphasize personal superiority and lack of empathy, raising concerns that the message might be viewed negatively, especially by young viewers and contradicting Olympic values such as respect, excellence, and friendship (Danziger, 2024). Ipsos' Creative Spark tool indicated that U.S. and U.K. consumers rated the ad poorly in

- Brand closeness
- Category performance
- Likelihood to purchase

suggesting the campaign failed to resonate with the audience (Danziger, 2024).

The campaign was also launched while Nike was already facing a financial crisis with declining revenues. It needed a clear response. A communications campaign was necessary to fix the brand's image, respond to criticism, and remind people that Nike stands for inclusivity, respect, and inspiration.

V. Research

Since Nike's brand is built around inclusivity, empowerment, and leadership, it would have been important to gather data on how certain consumers, such as athletes, parents, and

young customers, might interpret such a bold campaign. For this campaign, Nike would have wanted to know:

- Does the campaign align with Nike’s long-standing brand image of empowerment and inclusivity?
- What feelings does the campaign provoke?
- How do different consumers interpret the competitive messaging?

Research Methodology:

Primary:

- Qualitative: Nike should conduct focus groups with 20–30 participants (athletes, parents, young customers). The goal would be to test whether the bold messaging of the campaign feels motivating or alienating.
- Quantitative: Surveys could be sent to a few hundred Nike customers and sports enthusiasts. Questions might include: “Do you associate Nike with inclusivity and empowerment?” and “How would you respond to a campaign focused on winning above all else?” Responses would provide an understanding of how the campaign could affect brand perception and loyalty.

Secondary:

- Past campaigns: review past bold campaigns (e.g., Colin Kaepernick) to understand patterns in public reaction and whether sparking controversy is worth the outcome and risk.
- Social media research: monitor social platforms to stay relevant. Analyze the ongoing conversations and trends in sports, inclusivity, etc.
- Company reports: examine Nike’s annual reports and financial data to see how brand perception can affect performance (revenue).

VI. Situational Analysis

Strength:

- High-performance shoes: Nike constantly works to improve its shoes by using the best materials and newest technologies (Wu, 2022).
- Strong brand awareness and brand value: According to the Interbrand global brand ranking report, Nike is ranked at the #14 position with a brand value of \$45.4 billion. Nike is one of the most recognizable brands in the world.
- Athlete Endorsements: Partnerships with high-profile athletes like LeBron James and Serena Williams build brand credibility and visibility.
- Diverse Product Portfolio: Offers a wide range of products across various sports and lifestyles
- Product quality: Nike is known for producing high-quality products that are durable, comfortable, and perform well.

Weaknesses:

- Reputation risks: Nike has faced several controversies over the years regarding its labor practices, environmental impact, and marketing strategies.
- Declining Sales & Market Share: In the fiscal year 2024, Nike reported a 10% drop in revenue to \$11.59 billion and a 28% decline in net income to \$1.05 billion, partly due to reduced consumer spending and increased competition (Guardian, 2024).
- Dependence on third-party manufacturers: Nike outsources the production of its products to third-party manufacturers, which can create supply chain issues.
- High pricing: Nike's products are often priced higher than those of competitors, which can be a barrier for some consumers who are looking for more affordable options.

Opportunities:

- Expansion into new markets: Nike has a strong presence globally with the potential to expand into other untapped markets.

- Sustainability: With consumers being conscious of the environment, there's a rising demand for eco-friendly products. Nike has started improving its sustainability efforts, but there's still a lot of potential to do more.
- World Cup 2026: Nike anticipates a \$1.3 billion revenue boost from the upcoming FIFA World Cup (Miller, 2025).

Threats:

- Market saturation: The market is super competitive, with big brands like Adidas, Under Armour, and Puma fighting for attention, along with newer brands trying to make a name for themselves.
- Dupes: With Nike being a popular brand, it becomes a target for counterfeiters.
- Tariffs: Nike faces a potential \$1 billion financial hit due to U.S. tariffs on goods from China (Chapman, 2025).
- Changing trends and consumer behaviour: Nike needs to be aware of changing trends and consumer preferences.

VII. Strategic Insights

- Messaging risks backlash: While the campaign emphasizes high performance, it conflicts with Nike's brand promise of inclusivity and empowerment.
- High-profile athletes can both help and hurt perception: Endorsements from LeBron James and Serena Williams lend credibility to the brand, but relying solely on them may reinforce exclusivity. Audiences might see the campaign as celebrating superiority over anything else.
- Competition can be viewed differently: Big events like the 2026 World Cup are opportunities, but focusing only on winning could conflict with local values such as teamwork, effort, or participation.

VIII. Communication Goals

By using famous athletes, they lent credibility to the campaign. The insights for the campaign were directly chosen from athletes, many of whom shared their addiction to winning and chase to be the greatest ever. Key communication goals:

- Normalise the desire to win: Nike's campaign portrayed that there is nothing wrong with winning, and that if you don't want to win, you have already lost. They tried to inspire athletes (if you have a body, you are an athlete*) by celebrating the pursuit of victory and showcasing what passion for winning means (Nike Newsroom, 2024).
- To encourage the competitive spirit of elite athletes before the Olympics: Nike wanted to battle the traditional narrative that competitiveness is negative. They positioned it as a mindset of sacrifice, grit and passion, not just results (Nike Newsroom, 2024).
- Reinforce Nike's brand and voice: To remind audiences that Nike is a brand that strives to achieve greatness and push limits within its consumers. They wanted to initiate reflection and motivate audiences to pursue ambition.

IX. Communication Objectives

- Increase brand recognition among athletes and individuals by 15% within six months
 - Nike aimed to enhance brand recognition for the campaign among individuals who identify with a competitive mindset and approach. They used the bold messaging of winning and athlete-centric storytelling to resonate with the audience (Nike Newsroom, 2024).
- Increase social media engagement (likes, shares, comments) by 10% through the campaign within three months.
 - Through celebrity endorsements, Nike wanted to create deeper engagement with its audience across digital platforms. The campaign, however risky, did generate significant engagement. This can be seen through:
 - 2.5 million and 27k likes on YouTube

- 38k likes 4k shares on TikTok
 - 228k likes and 78k shares on Instagram (Milanini, 2024)
- Enhance and maintain approval rates of Nike's brand image by 8% among Gen Z and Millennial audiences within four months.
 - The campaign seemed to have targeted younger demographics (most impressionable) to shift the perception of winning and associate it with Nike.

X. Target Audiences

- Professional Athletes

This group represents the core audience of this campaign as it was released right before the Olympics and appeals to their values around winning, dedication and ambition.

- Demographics: Ages 18-40, male and female, with middle to high income, high school or a Bachelor's degree, includes professional and semi-professional athletes from around the world, with varying ethnicities.
- Psychographics: Highly goal-oriented, competitive, consumers of sports apparel and equipment, engage in competitions, training and events, loyal to quality sports products that last long.
- Geographics: Primarily from urban areas, preferably have access to sports facilities, more in countries with high sports participation, such as U.S., U.K., Australia, etc.

- Aspiring athletes and Gen Z

Nike set out to inspire the younger generation to change the perception of winning, and they wanted to do that while building cultural relevance and sparking conversation.

- Demographics: Ages 16-27, male and female, moderate income, diverse ethnicities, high school or a Bachelor's degree, including fitness enthusiasts and aspiring athletes
- Psychographics: Digitally active on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Youtube, affinity for style and performance, follow celebrity sports and fashion trends, value self-expression and authenticity, tend to support brands that take bold steps.
- Geographics: Urban areas, metropolitan cities, and college towns.

- Influencers

Influencers tend to amplify campaign reach and credibility. Nike often collaborates with athletes, creators and lifestyle influencers who tend to align with its values of ambition, performance with style and leadership.

- Demographics: Ages 20-35, male and female, moderate to high income, diverse ethnicities, bachelor's degree, strong professional networks.
- Psychographics: Socially-influential, social media heavy, engaged with health, fitness, lifestyle and fashion content. Into current fashion trends and statement pieces. Prefer story-telling and brands that take stances on issues. Often travel internationally for events, sponsorships, and brand partnerships.
- Geographics: Metropolitan cities, major urban areas (New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris), where global fashion and sports trends originate.

XI. Current Audience Brand Perception

Before the campaign, Nike was perceived as the go-to sports brand that is always on the “right side of history”, known for making statements with their high-quality products and campaigns pushing cultural boundaries on social justice, equality, and empowerment, even when it's controversial. It's known for being bold, authentic, highly inclusive and inspirational. After the campaign, Nike seemed to have lost the edge on inclusivity as “Winning isn't for everyone” was interpreted as elitist, leaving out everyday athletes and consumers. The campaign was about empowerment, but seemed to have only targeted the best, making the rest feel alienated and uninspired.

XII. Desired Audience Brand Perception

Nike's desired perception should be to bring back its image of empowering *all* athletes* (if you have a body, you are an athlete as per Nike), from professional Olympians to everyday runners and

casual wearers. It needs to continue leading cultural conversations and unite diverse communities through sport.

XIII. Key Message Mapping

- Over-arching message

“There’s nothing wrong with wanting to win.” (Nike Newsroom, 2024)

 - Nike’s over-arching message was to reframe ambition and dedication as something admirable. Through the campaign “Winning isn’t for everyone,” Nike wanted to normalise the desire to win and be the best. It wanted to reinforce its identity as a brand that celebrates grit, dedication, and an unapologetic drive - core values that resonate with its audiences.
- Professional Athletes

World record holder Jakob Ingebrigtsen “Every part of me is about winning,” he says. “It’s the most important thing, and it’s what I’m going to chase.” And the King, LeBron James: “As long as I’m out there on the floor, I’m trying to be the greatest ever.” (Nike Newsroom, 2024)

 - The campaign features a collective of its elite athletes showing the world the relentless pursuit, sacrifice and commitment it takes to win. By spotlighting professional athletes and their stories, Nike positions the brand as the tool to achieve greatness. It deepens the connection with athletes who see themselves reflected in this narrative.
- Aspiring Athletes and Gen Z

“If you don’t want to win, you have already lost.” (Nike, 2024, Youtube campaign spot)

 - This message is both motivational and confrontational, reflecting Nike’s long standing reputation to inspire while also pushing boundaries. Gen Z is focused on self-improvement and authenticity, and the campaign redefines “winning”

as a mindset. It encourages the youth to question how they measure success and sparking conversation around ambition and personal progress.

- Influencers

“This is about celebrating the voice of the athlete — the dreams that will be made real,”
Nike CMO Nicole Graham. (Nike Newsroom, 2024)

- This campaign wanted to position influencers and creators as authentic storytellers. The tone of the campaign which was raw and cinematic was purposefully designed for social media platforms. By encouraging creators to interpret the concept of “winning” through their own narrative, it allowed influencers to act as both storytellers and brand advocates.

XIV. Creative Platform

- Audience

Gen Z and aspiring athletes who value authenticity, individuality, and self-expression. This audience is digitally native, socially aware, and motivated by self-improvement rather than external validation. They follow trends on tiktok, Instagram and Youtube, where sports intersects with lifestyle and identity, sparking bold conversations - the reason why they also admire Nike for its bold statements and inclusivity.

- Brand

Nike has positioned itself as the world’s most culturally diverse and relevant sports brand. The campaign reinforced it’s role as a catalyst, challenging its audiences to reflect on ambition, success and self-worth. As Nike’s CMO said, the campaign celebrates the voices of athletes, emphasizing that true victory comes from having the right mindset, not just a medal.

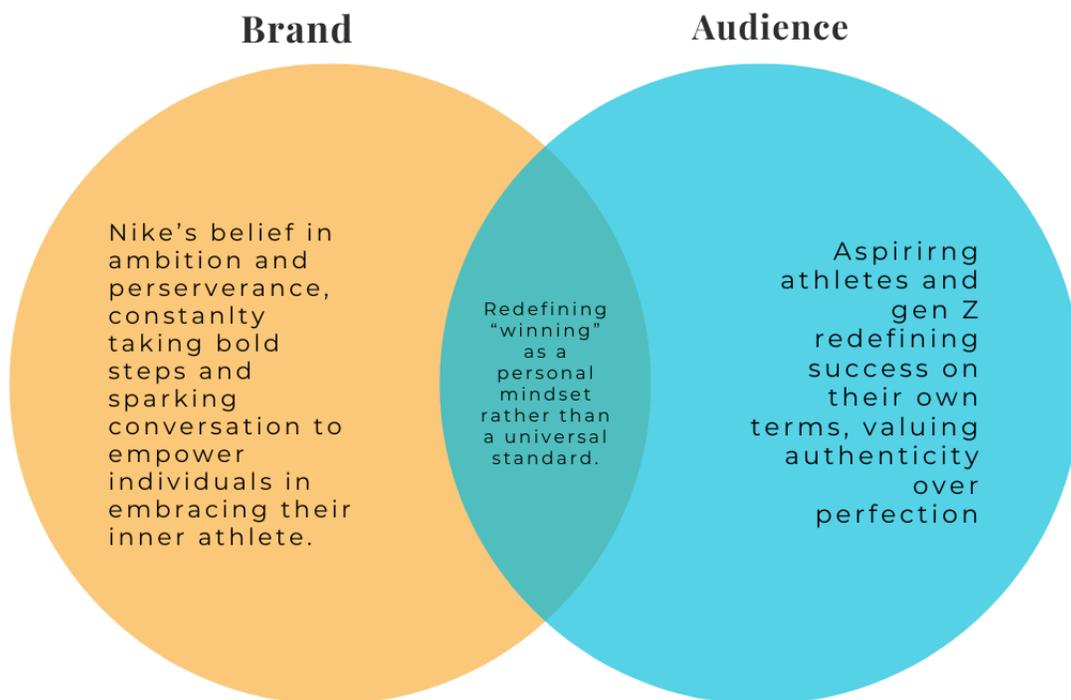
- Concept

Nike deliberately chose a more exclusive, competitive tone, positioning “winning” as something that requested sacrifice and drive, not just participation. This creative decision fit

Nike's long standing history of bold storytelling, but it also marked the shift from the usual motivational tone to something more reflective and challenging.

Visually, the campaign took a simple, raw and cinematic approach. It relied on close shots of athletes faces, quiet moments and intensity to portray the struggle and self-determination to be the best. This creative direction reflected the idea that greatness often happens in moments of doubt and isolation, not in the spotlight.

The conversation about mental health, ambition and pressure have been going on for a long time, especially for athletes and Gen Z who understand burnout and comparison culture. However, the campaign's bold tone sparked controversy. While some praised Nike for being thought-provoking. Others criticised it for alienating everyday athletes and contradicting the brand's long standing message of inclusivity. Despite the backlash, Nike did succeed in generating widespread discussion.



XV. Strategies

- Celebrity endorsements through personal narratives

Nike strategically partnered with a diverse range of athletes, creators and social media influencers to center the campaign around authenticity. By allowing each individual to share their own story of “winning”, the campaign became a collection of personal manifestos. It humanized the brand’s message. Many of the celebrities featured in the advertisements were idols and rolemodels who were not only known for their achievements but struggle and self-discovery.

- Launching before the olympics

Nike launched the campaign in the weeks leading up to the Olympics. It capitalized on the attention Olympics brought on competition and winning. The campaign was not only relevant but also gave Nike the higher ground to shape the conversation around “winning” before anyone else could. It framed the emotional dialogue surrounding the Games, influencing how audiences around the world would engage with the idea of victory.

- Bold statements and controversy over winning

Nike is known for sparking controversy, that has been one of their strategies for a long time. Nike inverted the narrative on who “winning” isn’t for. They wanted to spark curiosity and debate over around the meaning of ambition and failure. By reframing “winning” as a complex, emotional journey.

- Dominant but balanced tone

The campaign had an assertive but motivational tone with moments of softness. The tone was suppose to keep the balance and not alienate audiences who might perceive its message as elitist. However, it faced backlash and failed to keep the balance. It emphasized winning above all else which was against the values of Olympics and team spirit.

XVI. Tactics

- Paid Media

- Social media sponsorships: Nike partnered with high-profile athletes such as LeBron James, Serena Williams and Kylian Mbappé to create sponsored content tailored for platforms like Instagram, Tiktok and YouTube. This was clever to increase engagement and use real life examples. Advertisements were also used for billboards distributed across America and abroad. This boosted brand visibility globally and reinforced credibility by associating the campaign with trusted sports icons, helping Nike connect emotionally with audiences.

- <https://about.nike.com/en/newsroom/releases/winning-isnt-for-everyone-campaign>

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UR9zWdWvRXI>

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ra6wkIoJp0

- Video advertising: Targeted ads were placed strategically on sports streaming platforms, social media feeds and relevant websites. These ads used emotional messaging and behind-the-scenes athlete moments to connect with their audience.

- <https://www.sookio.com/blog/nike-winning-isnt-for-everyone-campaign-analysis-paris-olympics?>

- Earned Media

- Media coverage: The campaign was featured in various media outlets (good and bad) and lifestyle publications that focused on the creative concept and the broader conversation about what winning means. It helped cement credibility and broaden its reach beyond paid placements. Even negative reviews generated awareness and kept Nike in public conversation.

- <https://www.campaignasia.com/article/nike-unveils-olympics-campaign-winning-isnt-for-everyone/497293?>

- Forbes: Nike's campaign faced criticism for its "dark messaging," which some felt was inconsistent with the brand's previous emphasis on inclusivity and positivity. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pamdanziger/2024/08/16/nike-fails-in-the-winning-isnt-for-everyone-ad-campaign>
 - <https://advertisingweek.com/winning-isnt-for-everyone-but-nikes-latest-campaign-may-help-brands-in-the-third-sector-win/>
 - <https://triplejstudios.com/en-us/blog/winning-isnt-for-everyone?>
- Shared Media
 - Videos and images of athletes were shared across Instagram and Tiktok. The campaign hashtag (#winningIsntForEveryone) encouraged users to share their own interpretations of winning. This created a sense of community and engagement around the campaign, turning audiences into active participants and spreading Nike's message organically across social networks.
 - <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-5nyKEPXx3/?hl=en>
 - <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-pROy3N51V/>
- Owned Media
 - Nike newsroom and website: Nike utilized its owned channels, including its newsroom and website, to host an in-depth campaign. This included athlete profiles, behind-the-scenes videos, interviews, and curated user-generated content. This resource served as a hub for journalists, influencers, and fans to explore the campaign in greater depth, allowing Nike to maintain control over its narrative.
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