



# A Strategic Optimization Study of Nike's Digital Marketing in the Perspective of Generation Z

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**Abstract.** With the advancement of digitalization, Generation Z, as the native of the Internet, has become the core consumer for sports brands to compete for. This research focus on Nike, a world renowned sport brand, and analyzes its digital marketing strategy from the perspective of Generation Z. Through exploring the current situation of Nike's digital marketing and combining the knowledge and feedback of Generation Z, this research aims to identify problems, challenges and give forward optimization suggestions to Nike or other sports brands. The research finds out that Nike's digital marketing has advantages in terms of brand influence, technical strength, marketing channels and data analysis ability, but also exist problems that is insufficient personalized service, content innovation, interactive experience and data security. Therefore, this research proposes optimization strategies to strengthen personalized service, improve interactive experience, innovate marketing content, and deeply explore social attributes, aims to provide useful reference for Nike and other sports brands in the field of digital marketing for Generation Z, and promote the digital transformation and development of the sports brand industry.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Nike, Digital Marketing, Optimization of Marketing Strategies, Sports Brand.

## 1 Introduction

In today's society, the wave of digitalization is accelerating, and the internet has reshaped people's life and consumption patterns. In life, information acquisition has shifted to the applications on the media and the short videos, shopping relies on live broadcast and e-commerce platforms, and socialization has moved to online communities. In this situation, sports brand have also moved to the competition of digital marketing, and Gen Z has become the core audience for brands to fight for. First of all, this research clarify the definition of Generation Z, which refers to the group of people born in the late 1990s and early 2000s. They are the generation after the Millennial and before the Alpha Generation, which is called the first "digital natives", smartphones and the internet have been an integral part of their lives during their growth. Therefore, many sports brands are focusing on this generation. Among them, Nike as a global sports brand, has been actively exploring digital marketing methods. However, when facing this special generation, whether Nike's digital marketing strategies are effective

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or not and what potential problems and challenges remain. The purpose of this research is to analyze and optimize Nike's digital marketing strategy from the perspective of Generation Z, so as to provide a reference for Nike and other famous sports brands in digital marketing.

## 2 Related Theoretical Foundations

Before studying Nike's digital marketing strategy, this research briefly introduces the theoretical foundations related to it, including digital marketing theory, consumer behaviour theory and brand communication theory.

With the development of the digital era, the importance of digital marketing strategy in the business field is becoming more and more prominent. Under the current background of fierce competition in the market and different consumer behavior, understanding how digital marketing strategies influence consumers' purchase intention has become the key to enhance the competitiveness of enterprises [1]. According to Dara, digital marketing is a marketing method that effectively improves customers' awareness of a brand and increases their purchasing behavior by introducing and promoting a product or brand. It plays an important role in an organization's marketing strategy by conducting activities with the help of one or more Internet media and is becoming a central part of the overall marketing strategy of many organizations [2]. Moreover, Dastane believes that digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that utilize electronic devices or the Internet. Organizations interact with existing and potential customers through digital channels such as search engines, social media, email and websites. This form of marketing is also commonly referred to as "online marketing", "internet marketing" or "web marketing" [3]. For Generation Z to buy Nike products, Nike publishes cooperation content with idol athletes, trendy product information, and launches interactive challenges on social media frequently used by Generation Z, such as Instagram, Facebook etc., which is in line with their pursuit of trend and social identity. Moreover, the personalized customization service on the official website and APP can also meet the needs of Generation Z to show their unique personalities. In addition, online brand communities allow Gen Z to find a sense of belonging in interaction, which greatly increases their willingness to buy.

In this era of changing consumer preferences, new technologies and innovations, it is important for all businesses to be aware that they are constantly influenced by a variety of factors. To be successful, it is important to understand the changing dynamics of the market [4]. Patrick Wong states, "Over the years, Nike has accelerated its digital transformation by expanding its global supply chain and 'investing heavily in digital technologies and information systems to support direct-to-consumer (D2C) e-commerce. " D2C, or direct-to-consumer, is a business model or strategy for selling products directly to consumers without relying on intermediaries. Based on its D2C strategy, Nike plans to increase its digital penetration rate to about 30% by 2023 [5]. Nike has skillfully applied this theory in attracting the special group of Generation Z. It has been mentioned in the literature that in the community consumption on e-commerce platforms, consumers will seek social identity by joining specific communities, and factors

such as sense of community belonging and group interaction will have a significant impact on their consumption behavior [6]. Generation Z exhibits such a characteristic: they form a group identity through interest communities such as e-sports and national tide, and strengthen their sense of belonging to the group in the community interaction. At the same time, the celebrity effect also enhances their trust and identification with the brand. This sense of identity based on interest groups and celebrity effect satisfies the needs of Generation Z in terms of socialization, respect and even self-realization, which makes them more willing to buy Nike brand products.

Brand communication itself is a system involving multiple elements such as product characteristics, symbolic meaning, and cultural values, and the process of analyzing it is highly complex. Some scholars have shown that the public domain is an open, traffic-sharing digital space, where traffic distribution is controlled by the algorithms and rules of large platforms, and brands will strive for exposure opportunities in a variety of ways to reach potential new users. The private domain, on the other hand, was first proposed by Alibaba in 2016, which emphasizes the closed nature of the space, autonomy and the precipitation of user relationships, and is a pool of user traffic that can be operated by the brand independently, with features such as repeatable reach [7]. Taking the sports brand Nike as an example, its Air Jordan, Air Force 1 and other series launched for Generation Z have formed a clear distinction from other sports brands by incorporating cultural symbols such as street trends and rebellious spirit. These symbols spread rapidly through social media, e-commerce platforms and other public domain channels, spreading to the target group with the help of platform traffic, not only realizing the large-scale penetration of brand cognition, but also accumulating the initial topic heat, search index and fan attention, so that Generation Z can form a unique memory point for it in the public domain field, laying the foundation for the subsequent transformation of the private domain. In the era of digital marketing, the constituent elements of the brand field are more complex, showing obvious dynamic and decentralized characteristics. The strategic development of the brand from public domain attraction to private domain deep cultivation and then to the whole domain synergy is far more than simple channel expansion or information flow optimization, but involves a profound adjustment of the structural relationship between brands, users, platforms and other multi-party subjects.

### 3 Nike Brand Overview

Nike is ranked 36th in the 2024 World's Top 500 Brands list, with a brand value of \$47.978 billion. As a sports company, Nike is mainly engaged in the design, development, production, marketing and sales of sport shoes, apparel, equipment, accessories and related services. The company was built in 1964, initially under the name of "Blue Ribbon Sports, Inc." and mainly represented the Japanese Tiger athletic shoes, and after changing its name to Nike in 1971, it began to design and produce athletic shoes on its own. The brand concept is to inspire athletes around the world and provide them with the best quality products, and the famous advertising slogan "Just do it" deeply interprets this spirit, which has been widely known. Nike's product line is very rich, covering

sports shoes, clothing, sports equipment, accessories, etc., involving a variety of sports fields, such as the Nike Mag sneakers designed for the movie *Back to the Future 2* in 1988, Hyper Adapt 1.0 sneakers launched in 2016, Adapt BB sneakers launched in 2019, as well as various types of clothing and sports equipment [8].

In recent years, Nike has remained a leader in the global sports brand industry. In terms of marketing performance, as of 2020, Nike's online sales are expected to account for one-third of its total revenue [9]. In terms of building brand image, Nike creates a unique image through continuous product digital innovation. For example, the launch of the Adapt series with self-lacing function, although the Adapt BB had problems such as connection failure for Android users, this attempt shows the brand's spirit of exploration. At the same time, Nike also uses cooperation with athletes and sports events to enhance its influence [10]. In terms of marketing strategy, Nike ID was launched in 1999 and later upgraded to Nike By You, which continuously promotes the digitalization of products as well as the integration of online and offline. After years of development, Nike has become one of the leaders in the global sports brand industry, with a wide consumer market and strong brand influence [11].

## **4 The Analysis of the Current Situation of Nike's Digital Marketing**

### **4.1 Nike's Existing Digital Marketing Channels and Strategies**

Nowadays, Nike not only conducts marketing through third-party channels, but also builds an exclusive platform to attract consumers. Nike has its own official website and APP, through which it can show consumers detailed product information, unique brand culture and limited-time marketing activities, so as to attract the Generation Z group and promote consumption; at the same time, it also provides consumers with special online shopping services, such as the customized sports shoes and clothing services launched on the official website and offline stores, which allow consumers to personalize their choices in terms of color and design, meeting the needs of young people for personalization and self expression [12]. For example, the customized sports shoes and clothing service on the official website and in offline stores allows consumers to make personalized choices in terms of color, design and other aspects, which meets the needs of young people for personalization and self-expression [12]. Not only that, Nike has official accounts in all major social media platforms, like WeChat, Shake, Instagram, etc., of which the number of fans on Instagram has exceeded 100 million. With the help of these social media platforms, which have a huge user base, Nike is able to interact with consumers and release product information and marketing activities, such as sharing content about athletes' and artists' collaborative projects, live events, and brand activities. In this way, Nike enhances its connection with youth, creates a sense of brand community, further enhances brand awareness and fosters customer loyalty. In addition, Nike collects consumers' email addresses and sends them product information, marketing campaigns, and coupons, among other benefits, in order to increase consumers' willingness to buy. At the same time, Nike also launched a membership program

to provide members with exclusive discounts, birthday gifts, early purchase rights and other privileges to strengthen the close relationship between teenagers and the brand, which is also an important means to enhance customer loyalty in its digital marketing [12].

## **4.2 Advantages and Shortcomings of Nike's Digital Marketing**

Nike, as a globally recognized sports brand, with a strong brand influence and consumer trust base, relevant research shows that Thailand's Generation Z has a 3.86-point trust in Nike, which lays a good foundation for its digital marketing [13]. At the same time, Nike has invested a lot of money and resources in the field of digital technology, relying on advanced technology and equipment, to provide consumers with quality services, which is highly consistent with its brand image of "focus on innovation and quality". In addition, Nike has a variety of digital marketing channels, research shows that its brand logo recall score of 4.57, competitor recognition score of 4.41, these channels can cover different types of consumer groups, by virtue of a wide range of coverage and a high degree of brand recognition, effectively enhance the marketing effect [13]. As a well-known brand, Nike has mastered a large number of different groups of consumer data, and through the collection and analysis of this data, it provides strong data support for digital marketing. Nowadays, with the help of artificial intelligence and other technologies, Nike has created a variety of digital marketing tools, such as virtual worlds and celebrity co-branding, etc. This unique marketing model accurately matches the pursuit of novelty experiences by Generation Z, and continues to attract this group and gain their sense of identity, which in turn promotes the sustained growth of the group's consumption demand.

However, although Nike has a variety of digital marketing channels, there are deficiencies in personalization, failing to meet the individual needs of different consumers, and there is a gap with the expectations of Generation Z for "uniqueness", the data show that Nike's brand personality uniqueness score of 3.76 [13]. In addition, in the process of collecting and using consumer data, there are data security problems, which may lead to the leakage of consumers' personal information, especially in the group of people who are more sensitive to privacy, and this problem may further affect brand trust.

# **5 Empirical Analysis and Strategy Reconstruction of Nike Digital Marketing Based on Youth Perspective**

## **5.1 Problems and Challenges of Nike Digital Marketing (Based on Generation Z Perspective)**

In the digital product strategy for youth, Nike has continued the idea of balancing standardization and adaptability in brand management, and launched sneakers that can be personalized to meet the personalized needs of youth. To a certain extent, these products have attracted some teenagers who pursue uniqueness and strengthened their brand awareness of Nike's "innovation and individuality". The advantage of these products is

that they fit in with the brand's long-standing concepts of sportsmanship and individuality, and maintain the consistency of its core values. However, the shortcomings are also obvious: the high price makes the products unable to fully cover the Gen Z group, ignoring the characteristics of the differences in the spending power of young people, which to a certain extent restricts the enhancement of the amount of young people's consumption.

In terms of the application of technology and digital platforms, Nike has launched the Nike land virtual world, which incorporates a large number of brand-related scenes, clothing and game activities, providing new scenes for teenagers to contact the brand and increasing the brand touch points. This approach follows digitalization trends, is in line with teenagers' interest in emerging digital experiences, and helps to increase brand exposure. However, the virtual world lacked online communication services for players, failing to meet the needs of Generation Z's love of interaction and communication, making it difficult to retain teenagers for a long time, and there was an obvious lack of interactive experience.

In terms of content innovation and digital presentation of product design, Nike mostly follows the previous design and launches new series by changing colors and shades, and the product content presented on the digital platform also continues this pattern. This is attractive to some teenagers who prefer classic designs, maintains the stable image of the brand, and reduces the risk of innovation by utilizing the market acceptance of existing designs to maintain the consistency of style. However, this approach lacks unique and novel content, making it difficult to satisfy Gen Z's strong demand for new things due to their widely different personalities, and failing to fully stimulate their desire to buy.

In terms of meeting the social attributes of teenagers, Nike's digital marketing mainly relies on third-party social media platforms, without establishing an exclusive shopping and sharing platform or software. Although the large user base of third-party platforms has expanded the scope of brand-related content to a certain extent, the brand's control over such shared content is weak, making it difficult to form a centralized brand social atmosphere. This obviously ignores the strong social attributes of Generation Z and fails to provide them with exclusive and convenient communication and sharing space, which is not conducive to enhancing the sense of belonging and adhesion of teenagers to the brand.

From the perspective of teenagers, Nike's marketing still has some unattended demand points. On the one hand, teenagers have a demand for "low cost personalization", while Nike's high-priced personalized products exclude some teenagers with limited consumption ability; on the other hand, teenagers are eager for "in-depth social interaction" in the digital environment, but Nike's virtual world and social platforms are not well constructed. On the other hand, teenagers desire "deep social interaction" in the digital environment, but Nike's virtual world and social platforms have failed to satisfy this, making it difficult for the brand to establish closer ties with teenagers and teenagers.

## 5.2 Nike Digital Marketing Strategy Optimization Suggestions

Nike should strengthen the collection and analysis of Gen Z consumer data, so as to accurately launch personalized products and services. As an important group in the current consumer market, Gen Z's consumption preferences have distinctive personalized characteristics, and data collection and analysis is the key to understanding the needs of this group. As mentioned in the literature, Nike uses social media matrix to attract potential consumers and guide shopping demand, and data analysis for specific groups can make this process more targeted [14]. Specifically, user profiles can be built by tracking data such as color preferences, design elements, personality phrases and consumption habits mentioned by Gen Z on social platforms. Then recommend customized products for them based on the profiles, such as launching limited edition sneakers based on a certain group's preference for retro styles, or designing product copy that incorporates their commonly used social language. This approach can make products and services more relevant to the needs of Generation Z and increase the consumer conversion rate.

Nike needs to enhance the interaction between its social media platforms and Gen Z to increase user stickiness. In the era of social media, users tend to get information in fragmented time, and interactive content can attract their attention more efficiently. The case of Nike's emotional connection with consumers through a themed movie during the epidemic in the literature shows that active interaction can deepen consumers' identification with the brand [14]. Specifically, online interactive activities can be organized, such as a quiz contest around popular sports topics, where correct answers are eligible for a lottery of limited edition products; or launching a "My Sports Story" campaign to encourage Gen Z to share their own experiences and interact with the brand. Such activities can not only increase the participation of Generation Z, but also enable the brand to better understand their needs and strengthen the emotional connection.

Nike should innovate its digital marketing content to meet Gen Z's pursuit of new and interesting content; Gen Z grew up in the age of information explosion and is less receptive to traditional marketing content, while creative content is more likely to attract their attention and spread. Literature points out that emotional marketing can effectively influence consumer decision-making by establishing emotional resonance, and novel content forms are important carriers of emotional transmission [14]. Specifically, it can be combined with the current popular culture, such as releasing product unboxing videos co-branded with popular games and anime on short video platforms; or utilizing virtual reality technology to produce immersive sports experience content, so that Gen Z can feel the performance of the product in the virtual scene. These innovative contents not only attract eyeballs, but also spread rapidly through social platforms to expand brand influence.

Nike can tap the social attributes of digital marketing to provide social platforms and opportunities for Generation Z. Generation Z values social identity, and shopping behavior is often closely integrated with social activities, and the literature mentions that Nike spreads socially valuable stories through social media to allow consumers to integrate into the community in order to satisfy their social needs, and this logic can be

extended to the mining of social attributes [14]. Specifically, a social e-commerce platform can be launched, with functions such as "friend order" and "shopping dynamic sharing" set up, so that Generation Z can communicate with friends in real time when shopping. Alternatively, the platform can set up interest communities, such as running enthusiasts' communities and trendy fashion communities, to encourage users to share their experiences of using products. It can also create communities of interest, such as those for running enthusiasts and trendy wearers, to encourage users to share their experience of using the products. This not only meets the social needs of Generation Z, but also drives consumption through the mutual influence of users, forming a virtuous marketing cycle.

## 6 Conclusion

This study examines Nike's digital marketing strategy from the perspective of teenagers. By analyzing the current situation of Nike's digital marketing, it explores Gen Zs' perceptions and feedback on its digital marketing, identifies existing problems and challenges, and proposes strategy optimization suggestions accordingly. The study finds that Nike's digital marketing has certain advantages in terms of brand influence, technical strength, marketing channels and data analysis ability, but there are still deficiencies in personalized service, interactivity, content innovation and data security. Based on the Generation Z perspective, Nike's digital marketing has the problems of unsatisfied personalized demand, interactive experience to be improved, insufficient content attraction and insufficient exploitation of social attributes. To address these problems, this study proposes the optimization of strategies such as strengthening personalized service, improving interactive experience, innovating marketing content, and exploring social attributes. It is hoped that this study can provide reference for Nike and other sports brands in digital marketing and promote the digital transformation and development of the sports brand industry.

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