

# A study on Nike's digital marketing strategy based on the 4Ps theory and analysis of competitiveness maintenance methods

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**Abstract.** This essay explores the concepts and theories of E-commerce, alongside the evolution and significance of digital marketing in the contemporary business landscape. It provides a comprehensive case study of Nike, focusing on its digital marketing strategies. Through Jerome McCarthy's 4Ps of marketing—product, price, place, and promotion—the study offers a detailed analysis of Nike's current brand positioning and placement strategies. The research includes a thorough review of existing literature and empirical studies, assessing Nike's approaches and comparing them to those of its direct competitors, such as Adidas, as well as indirect and hidden competitors within the broader apparel industry. Key elements examined include Nike's innovative digital campaigns, robust social media engagement, and interactive customer experiences. The study highlights how these strategies have enabled Nike to maintain its competitive edge and adapt to the fast-paced technological advancements in digital marketing. Additionally, the essay provides strategic recommendations for Nike to sustain and enhance its market position, emphasizing the importance of continuous innovation and adaptation in a rapidly evolving technological environment. The conclusion underscores that Nike's cutting-edge digital marketing strategies have significantly contributed to its ongoing success and leadership in the sportswear industry, ensuring its relevance and appeal to modern consumers.

## 1 Introduction

Nike, a leading global sportswear and equipment company, has consistently demonstrated an ability to stay ahead in the competitive market through innovative products and effective marketing strategies. In the digital age, where consumers increasingly rely on the internet and mobile devices for their shopping and interaction with brands, modern corporate operations rely heavily on the use of digital marketing to win sales. Nike's efforts with digital marketing have been pivotal in maintaining its brand image and market position. This essay examines Nike's current digital marketing strategies to this day and provides insight into how it can improve its competitive edge in the future. Moreover, this essay delves into Nike's current digital marketing strategies, mainly focusing on the 4Ps theory, and comparing them

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to those of direct, indirect, and hidden competitors. Lastly, this essay concludes with how Nike can improve and maintain its competitive edge.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 The concept of digital marketing**

Digital marketing has emerged as a powerful artillery of modern marketing strategies, transforming the way businesses interact with their customers in the digital age. The concept of digital marketing encompasses the use of various digital technologies, primarily the Internet and mobile devices, to interact with specific audiences and market goods and services. As written by Gryshchenko and Shkoda, the evolution of digital marketing has led to the development of personalized, interactive, and measurable campaigns that are generally more cost effective than traditional marketing methods [1]. The impact of digitization on modern marketing is significant, as it has changed how companies generate marketing strategies, develop marketing plans, and implement marketing activities. As the digital revolution continues to shape every aspect of human activity, the practical application of digital marketing is vital for businesses to maintain their competitiveness and success in the modern marketplace.

### **2.2 Overview of NIKE**

Nike, as a widely recognized international sportswear and equipment brand, is renowned for its cutting-edge products, iconic brand, as well as effective marketing strategies. The brand has established itself as a high-end brand that embodies performance in athletics, innovation, and also an aspirational lifestyle, cantered around the "Just Do It" slogan and the distinctive Swoosh logo [2]. Nike is renowned for its continuous product innovation, particularly in footwear technology, having pioneered groundbreaking technologies like Air cushioning, Flyknit uppers, and React foam to enhance comfort, responsiveness, and athletic performance. The company's marketing is characterized by emotive storytelling, celebrity endorsements, and a focus on brand experience, with high-profile athlete sponsorships, like Michael Jordan and LeBron James, being central to building brand desirability and equity [3]. To highlight the importance of digital marketing for Nike, the company's fourth-quarter income statistics for fiscal 2024 showed \$5.1 billion in direct revenues, a decrease of 7% and 8% on a reported basis. This resulted from a 10% decrease in Nike Brand Digital and a 2% decrease in Nike-owned stores. Furthermore, according to Kivilahti, digital sales already account for 25% of Nike's total revenue. This is because, ever since the pandemic began, digital sales have accounted for well over 50% of sales [4].

### **2.3 4Ps concept and theory**

The marketing mix, often referred to as the 4Ps of marketing, is a basic framework that companies utilize to create and implement successful marketing campaigns. Product, Price, Promotion, and Place are the four Ps. Neil Borden first proposed the 4Ps in 1953, and Philip Kotler popularized them in the 1960s. This framework helps businesses to consider the key elements that influence the success of their marketing efforts, such as the quality, features, and design of the good or service being offered, the pricing strategies used, the methods used to communicate with customers and persuade them to buy, and the methods of distribution that are employed to deliver the goods to the client [5]. Businesses that effectively integrate the 4Ps into their marketing strategies tend to outperform those that do not, as highlighted by

a study conducted by Kotler and Armstrong [6]. Similarly, a study by McCarthy emphasized the importance of considering all four elements in creating a comprehensive marketing strategy [7]. The 4Ps framework continues to be a cornerstone of marketing theory and practice, providing a structured approach to developing efficient methods of marketing that satisfy consumer demands and promote company success.

### **3 Nike's current digital marketing strategies**

#### **3.1 Product strategy**

Along with the growth of digital marketing, Nike has shifted away from selling standardized products and has invested heavily in establishing and improving their personalization system. In 2019, Nike introduced its new/evolved brand, Nike By You, which was a rebranding from the original NikeiD launched in 1999. Nike By You utilizes Nike's official online website and allows consumers to design freely from a selection of sneakers chosen by Nike. Interactive content as such can fulfill the needs of consumers who are unable to find sportswear that fits their fashion tastes in Nike's standard products. Thus, Nike By You ensures sales from these consumers. In addition, Nike By You disallows the return of already-received sneakers, as with most other customized products. Non-standardized products that were returned are generally unable to be put onto the market for sale again because consumers are unlikely to purchase a product that was customized for another person's tastes and preferences. Naturally, a policy that forbade returns of personalized goods would lower their demand quantity, though customers would inadvertently be encouraged to buy more basic items, as they are more likely to be returned, as asserted by Esenduran, Letizia, and Ovchinnikov [8].

#### **3.2 Pricing strategy**

Nike's digital marketing strategy, particularly regarding its pricing strategy, is an essential part of its general brand positioning and market competitiveness. This analysis delves into various aspects of Nike's pricing strategy within the context of its broader digital marketing efforts.

Nike's pricing strategy is fundamentally based on a premium pricing model. This approach is designed to reflect the high quality and innovative nature of its products. By setting higher price points, Nike not only reinforces its brand image as a leader in athletic performance but also targets consumers who perceive higher prices as an indicator of superior quality. This tactic works exceedingly well in the market for athletic clothing and footwear, where brand loyalty and perceived value are significant factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

Nike uses value-based pricing, in which the price of a product is determined not only by its manufacturing costs but also by the consumer's perception of its worth. This tactic is supported by Nike's continuous investment in research and development, ensuring that its products incorporate cutting-edge technology and design. For instance, innovations like Nike Air technology and Flyknit materials increase the perceived worth of their products, allowing Nike to validate premium prices [3].

Nike utilizes a dynamic pricing strategy that entails modifying prices according to a range of factors including market demand, consumer behavior, and competitive landscape. This flexibility enables Nike to optimize revenue while remaining competitive. For example, during peak shopping seasons or product launches, Nike may implement temporary price

reductions or promotional offers to stimulate sales without compromising its overall premium pricing strategy [3].

The shift towards a Direct-to-Consumer model has been a significant aspect of Nike's pricing strategy. By selling directly through its website and mobile applications, Nike can control pricing more effectively and create exclusive offers that enhance customer loyalty. As stated by Hou (2023d), this approach not only allows for better margin management but also provides Nike with valuable consumer data, enabling personalized marketing and pricing strategies tailored to individual preferences [3].

While maintaining a premium pricing structure, Nike also engages in strategic promotional pricing. This includes limited time offers, seasonal sales, and exclusive online releases that create a sense of urgency among consumers. For instance, Nike often runs promotions during major sporting events or holidays, which not only boosts sales but also reinforces its brand presence in the market. These promotions are carefully designed to attract consumers without diminishing the overall perception of the brand's value.

### **3.3 Digital promotional strategies**

Nike has a strong presence across major social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. They actively engage with consumers by encouraging user-generated content, such as sharing reviews with Nike products. Such a strategy both expands the brand reach and fosters a spirit of togetherness and loyalty among Nike's followers. For example, in a case study by Li and Yu (2023), Nike's "Just Do It" campaign on social media features diverse stories of athletes and everyday people pursuing their passions, resonating with a wide audience and consistent with the brand's commitment to empowerment and inclusivity [9].

Collaborating with influential athletes, celebrities, and social media personalities is a key aspect of Nike's digital marketing strategy. These partnerships help Nike reach new audiences and provide authentic endorsements that resonate with followers. For instance, Nike has partnered with popular figures like Cristiano Ronaldo, LeBron James, and Serena Williams, leveraging their massive social media followings to promote Nike products [10]. By aligning with influencers who embody the brand's values, Nike enhances its credibility and appeal among target demographics.

Nike's content marketing strategy focuses on storytelling that highlights the brand's values and inspires consumers. Campaigns like "Dream Crazy" and "Just Do It" go beyond product promotion and tap into deeper themes of empowerment, diversity, and perseverance. By creating high-quality, visually appealing content that resonates emotionally, Nike builds a strong connection with its audience. For example, the "Dream Crazy" campaign featured Colin Kaepernick and other athletes overcoming challenges, which sparked widespread discussion and engagement on social media [11].

### **3.4 Placing strategy**

Nike has significantly invested in its e-commerce capabilities, prioritizing direct-to-consumer (DTC) sales. This approach allows the brand to bypass traditional retail channels, providing a more controlled and customized shopping experience. The Nike website and mobile app serve as primary platforms for consumers to access the full range of Nike products, including exclusive releases unavailable through third-party retailers. This direct engagement not only increases profit margins but also enables Nike to collect key customer information, which may be utilized to tailor promotional activities and enhance product range. By focusing on DTC sales, Nike enhances brand loyalty and ensures a consistent customer experience across all digital touchpoints [12].

The Nike app is another foundation of its digital distribution strategy, offering users a seamless shopping journey. The app features a user-friendly interface, exclusive content, and functionalities such as augmented reality for virtual try-ons. This enhances customer satisfaction and reduces return rates, as consumers can envision how products will appear and fit before buying. Additionally, the app provides first access to new product releases and limited-edition items, encouraging users to engage with the brand more frequently. By integrating social features, Nike fosters community engagement, allowing users to connect with friends, join challenges, and share their fitness journeys [9].

Strategic partnerships with various online platforms and retailers further enhance Nike's digital distribution. Collaborations with established e-commerce sites allow Nike to access a broader audience and increase sales. By partnering with platforms like Amazon, Nike can reach consumers who prefer shopping through these channels while maintaining a strong online presence. This approach expands Nike's market coverage as well as enhances brand visibility in the crowded digital marketplace, attracting new customers who may not visit Nike's website [12].

## **4 Nike's competitors' marketing strategies**

### **4.1 Adidas and Under Armour: direct competitors**

As Nike's main direct competitors, Adidas and Under Armour each employ distinct digital marketing strategies that reflect their brand identities and target demographics. A comparative assessment reveals both similarities and differences in their approaches.

Adidas has successfully integrated social media, particularly Instagram, into its marketing strategy. The brand targets a younger demographic, utilizing influencer partnerships and user-generated content to foster community engagement. Recent studies indicate that Adidas's use of Instagram has significantly contributed to its brand awareness and consumer loyalty, particularly among the 18-29 age group, which constitutes a large portion of its target market [13]. Adidas also emphasizes sustainability in its marketing campaigns, appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.

Under Armour has focused on multichannel marketing strategies, particularly through campaigns like "I Will What I Want," which aimed to expand its reach into the women's apparel market. This campaign utilized social media as a core component, showcasing the brand's commitment to inclusivity and empowerment [14]. While Under Armour has made strides in digital marketing, it still lags behind Nike and Adidas in terms of overall brand visibility and social media following, indicating a need for more aggressive digital strategies to enhance its market position [15].

### **4.2 Hoka One One, On Running, Gym Shark: new competitors**

Relatively new entrants to the sportswear market, Hoka One One, On Running, and Gym Shark, all do not already pose a threat to Nike but have the potential to develop into large competitive sports brands. This analysis goes through the effectiveness of these growing competitors's digital marketing strategies.

Hoka One One employs influencer marketing and personalized email campaigns as key components of its digital marketing strategy. By collaborating with elite athletes and influencers, the brand builds trust and credibility among serious runners. This strategy is effective as it taps into the followers of these influencers, expanding Hoka's reach and enhancing brand visibility. Research indicates that influencer marketing significantly increases brand awareness and sales, particularly for small to medium enterprises (SMEs)

[16]. Additionally, personalized email marketing engages customers by providing tailored recommendations, which has been shown to improve conversion rates and customer retention [17].

On Running focuses on high-quality visual content and storytelling. The brand effectively uses stunning imagery and videos to showcase its products, which resonates well with its target audience. This strategy enhances brand perception and emotional connection, leading to increased customer loyalty. Studies show that brands investing in quality content marketing see higher engagement rates and improved sales performance [18]. On Running's narrative about its Swiss heritage also differentiates it in a competitive market, reinforcing its brand identity and appealing to consumers' desire for authenticity.

Gym Shark's digital marketing strategy heavily relies on influencer partnerships and user-generated content (UGC). By collaborating with a diverse range of fitness influencers, Gym Shark effectively reaches a broad audience, leveraging the trust these influencers have built with their followers. This strategy has proven effective, as influencer marketing has the potential to yield a return on investment (ROI) of up to 11 times the initial spends [19]. Moreover, encouraging UGC fosters community engagement and authenticity, which are crucial for brand loyalty in the fitness industry.

### **4.3 Lululemon and The North Face: potential competitors**

Lululemon and The North Face are prominent players in the athletic apparel market and as hidden competitors of Nike, they each employ distinct digital marketing strategies that reflect their brand identities and target demographics. This assessment compares their approaches, focusing on community engagement, social media presence, and e-commerce strategies.

Lululemon has cultivated a strong community-oriented marketing strategy, leveraging local brand ambassadors instead of celebrity endorsements. This approach fosters a sense of belonging among customers, particularly in markets like China, where the brand has established WeChat communities to enhance engagement and loyalty [20]. Their digital strategy emphasizes social media interaction, utilizing platforms to interact with consumers on an individual basis, and creating content that resonates with their lifestyle-oriented brand image [21]. The brand also integrates e-commerce with physical retail, enhancing the customer experience through an omnichannel approach. Their investment in connected fitness through the acquisition of Mirror showcases their commitment to merging digital content with physical products, allowing for a seamless customer journey from online to offline.

The North Face focuses on experiential marketing, sponsoring major athletic events, and engaging in sustainability initiatives that resonate with their adventurous target audience. Their digital marketing strategy includes robust storytelling across social media platforms, emphasizing outdoor experiences and environmental consciousness [22]. The brand's website is designed to facilitate exploration, featuring rich content that highlights product functionality and adventure. While The North Face has a strong brand presence, it faces challenges in enhancing customer loyalty and improving product technology communications, suggesting areas for growth in its digital marketing efforts [22].

While all three brands utilize digital marketing to enhance their market presence, Lululemon and Nike stand out for their innovative and community-focused approaches. The North Face still has the opportunity to strengthen its digital strategies to compete more effectively.

## **5 How Nike can improve and maintain its competitive edge**

### **5.1 Enhancing community engagement**

Nike can enhance its competitive advantage by implementing localized community programs that focus on health, fitness, and sports. These initiatives can include sponsoring local sports teams, organizing community events, and providing resources for youth sports. Such programs both foster a feeling of inclusion and loyalty among consumers and also allow Nike to align its brand with community values and needs, thereby increasing brand visibility and relevance [23].

Utilizing digital platforms for community engagement is crucial in today's interconnected world. Nike can create online forums and social media campaigns that encourage consumers to share their fitness journeys and participate in community challenges. This approach not only builds a strong community around the brand but also facilitates collaboration and communication among consumers, enhancing brand loyalty and consumer insights [24].

### **5.2 Enhancing sustainability efforts**

Nike can significantly enhance its competitive edge by prioritizing sustainable innovation in product development. This involves integrating environmentally friendly materials and technologies into its product lines. One key strategy is the Materials Sustainability Index, which Nike has developed to guide product teams in selecting materials with lower environmental impacts. By expanding the use of recycled materials, such as recycled polyester and organic cotton, Nike can effectively reduce its carbon footprint while appealing to eco-conscious consumers [25]. Additionally, the introduction of innovative technologies like Flyknit not only minimizes waste during production but also enhances product performance. By continuing to innovate in sustainable materials and manufacturing processes, Nike can differentiate its offerings and attract a growing segment of environmentally aware consumers. Leading in sustainable product innovation positions Nike as a pioneer in the athletic apparel market, fostering brand loyalty and appealing to new customers who value sustainability in their buying choices.

Another critical strategy for Nike to enhance its sustainability efforts and maintain a competitive edge is the adoption of circular economy practices. This approach involves creating systems that reduce waste and promote the reuse of materials. One notable initiative is the Reuse-A-Shoe Program, which encourages consumers to return their old footwear for recycling. The collected shoes are transformed into new products, such as athletic surfaces and new footwear lines. This not only minimizes waste but also engages consumers in sustainability efforts, fostering a feeling of a brand community. Furthermore, Nike can implement strategies focused on product lifecycle management, emphasizing the design of products for longevity and recyclability. By using modular designs and easily recyclable materials, Nike can extend the life cycle of its products and significantly reduce their environmental impact. Embracing circular economy principles allows Nike to reduce waste, lower production costs, and enhance customer loyalty, aligning with the values of a growing demographic of consumers who prioritize brands committed to sustainability.

### **5.3 Expanding digital transformation**

Nike has significantly expanded its digital footprint by developing and enhancing various mobile applications, such as the Nike app, Nike Training Club, and Nike Run Club. These platforms offer personalized shopping experiences, fitness tracking, and community

engagement, allowing users to customize their interactions with the brand. The Nike app, for instance, offers tailored product recommendations based on user preferences, enhancing customer loyalty and engagement. According to Aiko and Xperge, this strategic focus on digital platforms not only strengthens Nike's direct-to-consumer (DTC) model but also positions the brand to capture a larger share of the growing e-commerce market, which accounted for 26% of its total revenue in recent reports.

Investing in data analytics to guide marketing and product development is a crucial component of Nike's digital transformation. By leveraging insights from its NikePlus loyalty program and other data sources, Nike can identify consumer trends and preferences, allowing for more targeted marketing campaigns and product lines. Nike's ability to create personalized experiences that resonate with customers is enabled by this data-driven approach, ultimately driving sales and enhancing customer satisfaction. The integration of predictive analytics tools further supports Nike's ability to anticipate consumer needs and optimize its marketing strategies.

## **5.4 Innovating product development**

Investing in green innovation is crucial for Nike to differentiate itself in the marketplace. Research indicates that green innovation positively influences competitive advantage by improving product quality and market share while enhancing the firm's image. Companies that adopt eco-friendly practices can meet the growing consumer demand for sustainability, thereby gaining a competitive edge. This is supported by findings that show green innovation mediates the connection between competitive edge and company success, emphasizing its importance in today's business environment [26].

Continued commitment to research and development (R&D) is essential for Nike to remain at the leading edge of the athletic apparel industry. R&D expenditures have been shown to positively affect competitive advantage, particularly when combined with innovative practices. By prioritizing R&D, Nike can develop cutting-edge technologies and goods that both satisfy consumer needs and also set new trends in the market. This aligns with research that highlights the critical role of R&D in fostering sustainable competitive advantage through innovation [27, 28].

## **6 Conclusion**

Nike's cutting-edge digital marketing strategies have significantly contributed to its ongoing success and leadership in the sportswear industry. These strategies have helped Nike maintain its relevance and appeal to modern consumers by adapting to technological advancements and fostering strong customer engagement. However, this study has a few limitations that need to be acknowledged.

Firstly, the study makes extensive use of secondary data, such as previously published works and empirical studies, which may not fully capture the most recent developments in Nike's digital marketing strategies. Additionally, the focus is primarily on digital marketing, potentially overlooking other critical aspects of Nike's overall business strategy, such as supply chain management, corporate social responsibility, and innovation in product development. These areas are equally important in staying competitive in the sportswear industry.

Another limitation is the geographical scope of the study. Although it offers a thorough examination of Nike's overall digital marketing tactics, it does not delve deeply into how these strategies may vary across different regions and markets. Given the global nature of Nike's business, understanding regional differences and local adaptations of marketing strategies is crucial for a more complete assessment.



Future studies could incorporate primary data collection techniques to overcome these limitations, including consumer surveys, to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of Nike's digital marketing efforts. Primary data would provide a more nuanced understanding of consumer perceptions and behaviors, allowing for a more detailed analysis of how Nike's strategies resonate with its target audience. Additionally, a longitudinal study tracking changes in Nike's digital marketing strategies over time could offer valuable insights into their long-term impact on brand loyalty and customer retention.

Expanding the scope of future research to examine other factors that contribute to Nike's competitive edge is also essential. For instance, exploring Nike's supply chain management practices and how they integrate sustainability and innovation could provide a more holistic view of the company's overall strategy. Investigating Nike's initiatives for corporate social responsibility and their influence on customer loyalty and brand perception would also be valuable. These areas are increasingly important in today's business environment, where consumers are more conscious of ethical and sustainable practices.

Moreover, future studies could analyze how Nike's competitors adapt to technological advancements and shifting consumer preferences. Comparing Nike's strategies with those of direct competitors like Adidas and Under Armour, as well as indirect competitors like Lululemon and The North Face, would offer a broader perspective on the industry's competitive dynamics. Understanding how these companies leverage digital marketing, innovation, and sustainability to differentiate themselves in the market could provide valuable lessons for Nike and other businesses. The potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to improve the efficacy of digital marketing is a viable study topic. As these technologies become more advanced, they offer new opportunities for personalized marketing, predictive analytics, and automation of marketing tasks. Investigating how Nike and other leading brands are incorporating AI and machine learning into their digital marketing strategies would provide insights into the future of marketing in the sportswear industry.

Finally, exploring the impact of emerging technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, on consumer engagement and brand experience would be worthwhile. With immersive and engaging experiences that go beyond conventional marketing strategies, these technologies have the power to completely transform the way that customers connect with businesses. Analyzing how Nike and other companies are experimenting with these technologies could offer a glimpse into the future of digital marketing.

In conclusion, considering this research offers a thorough examination of Nike's digital marketing tactics and their contribution to the company's success, it is essential to address its limitations and explore new areas of research. By incorporating primary data, examining other critical aspects of business strategy, and investigating the role of emerging technologies, future studies can provide a more holistic and detailed understanding of how Nike and similar companies can sustain and enhance their market positions in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

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