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ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES ON CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY: A STUDY OF NIKE CUSTOMERS IN THE UK

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to evaluate the impacts of Nike's public relations strategies on customer-based brand equity by analyzing the perceptions of Nike customers in the UK. It has also evaluated the effectiveness of Nike's PR strategies and its customer-based brand equity based on customers' perceptions through rating on a five-point Likert scale. This study was conducted based on positivism philosophy and deductive reasoning. This means seven hypotheses were developed based on literature and theories associated with public relations and customer-based brand equity. Primary data from the customers of Nike were collected to test those hypotheses. The strategy of a survey through an online questionnaire tool has been implemented to collect data from Nike customers in the UK. A sample of 151 customers was chosen based on the convenience sampling technique. The data analysis followed statistical and mathematical techniques, including frequencies, charts, percentage analysis, standards deviation, arithmetic mean, correlation, and regression.

This study identified that PR strategies have significant positive impacts on customer-based brand equity. This means all the seven PR strategies considered in this study have significant positive impacts on CBBE. The correlation and regression between PR strategies and CBBE indicated that the PR strategies of Nike and customer-based brand equity are intercorrelated with each other and overall PR strategies have significant positive impacts on CBBE with $\beta = 0.817$ and $p = 0.000$. PR strategies implemented by Nike are significantly effective based on customers' perceptions in the UK. Nike has also been significantly managing its customer-based brand equity in the UK.

Keywords: Public Relations, Nike, PR Strategies, Tactics, Customer-Based Brand Equity, Crisis Management

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Public relations (PR) is a procedure of leveraging different media channels to publicise a business or any other not-for-profit organisation and encourage a positive image among the general public. PR is also considered a strategy for branding. However, PR is more focused on communication and reputation management, while branding focuses on different visual factors such as name, logos,

materials for marketing, website, name, and symbols associated with a company or a brand Decker (2020). PR is also associated with brand management and crisis communications. This means it assists organisations to cultivate a positive reputation or public image through different earned media, including social media, in-person engagement and traditional media Finkle (2018).

CBBE is used to demonstrate how a brand's success can be directly attributed to the attitudes of customers towards the brand. It relates to how the customers' attitude towards a brand significantly influences the overall business success. If customers within a competitive market recognise, understand, and join with a brand, the organisational performance will go up. This means CBBE helps to generate positive brand attitudes among potential customers Eusebius (2019). CBBE is based on five factors, including value, performance, trust, social image, and commitments Keller (2001). So, each brand should concentrate on building these elements in customers' minds through developing and implementing appropriate strategies. Different activities and strategies to build CBBE should aim to raise the value of the associated brand and develop insights into the needs and expectations of customers Aaker (2009).

Brand equity is considered the true driver of Nike's continued success and growth. Nike has successfully developed a strong and well-established brand by fulfilling elements of brand equity, including brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. Different PR activities and strategic marketing communications combined with high-quality products have significantly supported Nike to gain higher brand equity. The slogan "Just Do It" and its logo allowed the company to increase its brand image among global audiences Goudreu (2017). Nevertheless, Nike is not free from criticism as being sweatshops and unethical production in history Robertson (2020). But the company is highly successful to manage its brand reputation through effective PR and marketing campaigns. In this context, this research evaluates Nike's public relations strategies, how these strategies support the company to gain continuous growth and to what extent these strategies support Nike enhancing CBBE.

1.2. COMPANY PROFILE OF NIKE

Nike and its subsidiaries design, develop, market, and sell authentic apparel, footwear, accessories, and sports equipment globally. It sells Nike brand products in different categories, including football, Nike basketball, running, training, and sportswear. It also sells various products designed for kids and other recreational and authentic usages like cricket, baseball, golf, skateboarding, volleyball, tennis, wrestling, walking, and other outdoor activities Nike (2022). The company also sells performance accessories and equipment, including socks, bags, eyewear, sports ball, digital devices, timepieces, gloves, bats, protective equipment, and different kinds of plastic products to other producers. The company also provides causal and athletic footwear, apparel, casual sneakers, and accessories under All-Star, Converse, Chuck Taylor, Star Chevron, One Star, and Jack Purcell trademarks. Nike was officially founded in 1964 Yahoo Finance (2021). Nike UK also participates in these activities across the UK, which was founded in 1985 Bloomberg (2021).

1.3. RATIONALE OF RESEARCH

There are many instances that Nike's brand was synonymous with unethical productions and sweatshops. Its reputation for using unfair labour to produce sneakers and activewear goes back to the 1990s. Nike was criticised for using

sweatshops in the 1970s. It was highly criticised for very poor working conditions and paying low wages for the workers in its production sites, including the Indonesian site. The company was the focus of extensive protests and criticism for its factories with poor working conditions and the use of child labour Robertson (2020). A photo of a child stitching "Swoosh" football was published by Life Magazine in 1996. An inspection report after a year highlighted that 77% of workers at a manufacturing site of a supplier had respiratory issues because of exposure to dangerous chemicals far higher than the legal standard at that time. The perception of sweatshops was one of the largest issues the company had faced. Due to increasing pressure, the company was compelled to make significant changes in production sites, wages, and other public relations issues. The company also increased minimum wages, improved overall labour relations practices, and made production sites safe with clean air Lutz (2015).

These changed and admissions helped to gain positive public sentiments towards Nike. Nike had become more transparent than its competitors regarding its labour practices, published a 108-pages report highlighting pay and conditions in its production sites and acknowledged negative public issues. After that time, the company is continuously publishing reports of factory conditions Lutz (2015). The Business of fashion claimed that Nike had successfully changed its negative image to a distinguished sustainable market leader in North America for environmental and social performance Abnett (2016).

However, many of its practices and policies are still considered controversial. A report published by Ethical Consumer highlighted that gender discrimination toward female athletes and their parents, allegations of forced labour in its supply chain, and failure to ensure a living wage for the employees (Ethical Consumer, 2021). The report also stated that Nike is spending a large amount of money on political lobbying every year. The company also received the worst rating in the Tailored Wages UK 2019 report that was published by The Clean Clothes Campaign in 2019. The company also received the worst rating by Ethical Consumer for its cotton sourcing policies as the company lacks an apparent approach for using herbicides and pesticides. Nike used Better Cotton Initiative certified cotton and some organic cotton, but these cottons were not 100% sustainable, which is contradicting its commitment to using 100% sustainable cotton. The company also uses animal leather as a raw material. Harmful chemicals are massively used by leather companies. The company reported that it is using certified leather by Leather Working Group (LWG) in its Impact Report in 2019, but there was no clear information regarding what percentage was certified by LWG gold standards Nike Impact Report (2019). It is also argued that Nike is also closing its communication channel through which labours could raise their issues, independent and objective investigations of employees' concerns Gearhart (2017).

Regardless of these issues and criticism, Nike was able to increase its global revenue from just US $199 million in 1984 to $44.5 billion in 2021 Nike Impact Report (2019). The company has also announced that it is switching to 100% renewable energy by 2025 by partnering with factories using rooftop solar energy in China, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The company is committed to improving manufacturing procedures, the production of fabric and significantly reducing its carbon footprint. The company will also eliminate single-user plastic bags in its retail outlets. Nike is therefore moving toward the sustainability agenda with the "Move to Zero" campaign, which is a commitment to reducing carbon emissions and zero waste Cook (2020). In this way, Nike is managing its reputation and public relations issues by focusing on sustainable business practices. In this context,

evaluation of its PR strategies and how these strategies helped the company to enhance customer base brand equity in the UK market has been a research issue. This study evaluated customers' perceptions regarding the overall PR strategies of Nike and analysed the impacts of PR strategies on customer-based brand equity.

1.4. AIMS, OBJECTIVES & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The major aim of this study is to critically evaluate PR strategies implemented by Nike and how those strategies influence customer-based brand equity through evaluating perceptions of Nike's customers in the UK. The key objectives of this research are listed below.

1) To critically evaluate overall PR strategies implemented by Nike in the UK.
2) To analyse Nike's customer-based brand equity through evaluating customers' perceptions of Nike products.
3) To examine the impacts of PR strategies on customer-based brand equity.

The following research questions were investigated in this research.

1) What are the PR strategies used by businesses as a part of marketing?
2) How does PR affect the brand equity of a company?
3) Why do large companies focus on PR activities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. CONCEPTS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

PR is "the management of communication between an organisation and its public" Grunig and Hunt (1984) This definition is one of the popular definitions of PR as it conveys much information by using minimal words. It includes major four components, which are management, communication, organisation, and public. PR has radically deviated from its historic roots in journalism and publicity to become a discipline in management Bowen et al. (2019). Similarly, another short definition of PR was mentioned by Kitchen in 1997, which includes just four words "the communication with various publics". Nevertheless, this definition ignores the purpose of communication and management functions Tench and Yeomans (2006).

According to CIPR (n.d.) "PR is about reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you." It is a discipline that looks after the management of reputation, to gain an understanding as well as support and influence behaviours and opinions. CIPR further added that it is the planned and sustained efforts to create and maintain corporate goodwill and mutual understanding between an enterprise and its general public. So, this definition uses three components that are organisation, public and understanding. Organisation means a business, a governmental body, a public service, a profession, or a body associated with culture, health, education, charity, etc. Similarly, the public refers to various stakeholders of an organisation, including customers, employees, investors, management, suppliers, government, and other groups who are affected or could be affected by the activities of the organisation Freeman et al. (2010).

Similarly, Cutlip et al. (2006) define PR as the management function that helps to identify, establish, and maintain mutually advantageous relations between an organisation and its various publics or stakeholders on whom its failure or success depends. This definition states PR is a management function to develop mutually beneficial connections between the public and the organisation. A similar approach to PR definition was given by Bowen et al. (2019), which stated the field of PR is a

management function that uses communications to develop relationships and trust. Public Relations Society of America defines PR as a strategic communication procedure, which develops mutually beneficial relations between organisations and their public PRSA (2021). PRSA adds that PR is about influencing, building, and engaging relationships with major stakeholders across various communication platforms to generate positive public perceptions of an organisation. It also includes anticipating, analyse, and interpreting public attitudes, opinions, and issues, which might have a significant influence on the strategic plans and operations of the organisation.

However, Moloney (2000) argued that PR activities are power and manipulation against democracy because PR strategies are often used as a tool for supporting government and commercial interests by using others' interests. According to Filip Kochan, World Bank's communication officer, PR is an ability of an organisation to attract the attention of targeted audiences through tactical and strategic communication of key messages. It requires the development of relationships with targeted audiences or message transmitters Kowal (2021).

Thus, the above discussions and definitions stated that PR is about managing mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its key stakeholders through effective communication strategies and gaining a positive public image and reputation.

2.2. BRIEF HISTORY OF PR

PR is generally believed to be a 'young profession' that is a kind of communications strategy by-product of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the methods of persuasive and organised communications have a long history. According to Stockwell (2007), the songs of the shaman were implemented to unite different tribal groups in history. Similarly, the ballads of ancient bards preserved the legends and myths that 'tied together growing countries. Possibly, one of the best historical instances of professional communicators is uncovered in Greece in the ancient period, where the Sophists created and trained the rhetoric art. Aristotle stated that rhetoric was an important aspect of Athenian democracy and public life as it permitted the gathering of the public to debate and decide based on their best interests. Those rhetorical interactions were the spirit of the early shape of deliberative democracy and that is still practiced in parliaments, democratic politics, and political PR. For example, Aristotle claimed that components of a persuasive speech are pathos, ethos, and logos Martinelli (2011). Pathos signifies rhetorical appeals to systems of beliefs and emotions, and its contemporary implementations can comprise the use of inspirational quotes, stories, and vivid languages. Similarly, ethos signifies the trustworthiness and credibility of the presenter. Finally, logos indicate the quality of reasoning and logic within arguments. These above rhetoric dimensions are still considered by current practitioners in the public relations field while they use a campaign of communication that seeks to build support for a specific brand or a particular individual, or while using a third-party representative for endorsements Hobbs and Mann (2015).

PR was also visible in the art of rhetoric followed by the ancient Greeks with notable development of PR practices complemented in various political events in history. Both state and church in medieval European society sought to dominate the opinions of societies and used painting, preaching, songs, scripture, public announcements, rituals, etc. as a form of influencing communication Harrison (2011). Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation in

the 17th century developed the term propaganda to indicate persuasive communication to influence public opinions. Propaganda was noticeable in the form of a pamphlet that subsequently became an important part of major military and political events from the time of the French Revolution Hobbs and Mann (2015).

The modern form of PR was believed to emerge in the 1800s and early 1900s in the United States. A new type of communication professional emerged in the form of a 'press agent' in the 1930s as businesses and promotors identified new techniques of communication with the public instead of paying for costly ads in magazines and newspapers. At that time, the role of the press agent was to create news stories for gaining the attention of different journalists, hence gaining free publicity for events like visiting a circus, a case like the anti-slavery movement, or a product like the latest medical elixir Harrison (2011).

Martinelli (2011) argued that Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays are considered as 'founding fathers' of modern PR because of their significant contributions to shaping the practice and principles of this emerging profession. Ive Lee started his profession as a business journalist, later he worked as a political publicity press agent and started his organisation in New York in 1904. He was considered a new type of publicist. Lee and his partner George Parker co-authored a motivational or persuasive 'Declaration of Principles' that was sent to newspaper editors, in which he promised his firm to offer a different standard of professionalism that includes accurate information about the public's subject of interest Hobbs and Mann (2015).

Several communication tactics were also introduced by Lee that significantly supported his commitments to transparent and fair dealings. The first tactic was the idea of a 'press release' that detailed the message of a client and provided authentic information that is accountable, transparent, and useful for journalists to create stories or news. The press release has become one of the most popular and often used tactics of PR. Lee's second innovation was the view of disclosure and openness during a crisis. For example, Lee convinced managers to provide authentic information about the accident that resulted in the deaths of 50 people before speculation and rumour took hold of the news cycles following. Moreover, he also welcomed different journalists to the scene and actively answered their questions instead of seeking to evade their inspections Harrison (2011). That approach to managing crisis was observed as more socially legitimate than other previous practices by business firms to conceal information and keep journalists at a far distance. It also assisted companies in minimise damages to their brand image or public image by emphasising particular failures within a wider system that even with a large crisis, is persistent to provide advantages for the societies, including tax revenues, employment opportunities, etc. Coombs (2006). Thus, Lee's approaches and principles had wider appeal and long-term influence on crisis communication and media relations.

Contrary to Lee's approach to PR, Edwards Bernays is a more controversial personality in PR history. He introduced ideas from sociology and psychology based on his uncle Sigmund Freud a famous psychologist's approach to the PR practice Harrison (2011). He initiated his profession as a press agent and later invented the terminology 'public relations council' to explain his activities in 1921. He had also published many persuasive and influential books on PR and public opinions and taught the first course entitled public relations at New York University in 1923 Hobbs and Mann (2015). Similar to Lee, Bernays also viewed the role of PR practitioners as activists in the field of public opinions Pfau and Wan (2006). In contrast to Lee, Bernays viewed PR as a type of strategic communication, which should be used by the practitioners to get consent through the creation of

persuasive messages that could resound society. Undeniably, the persuasion approach of Bernays was seen as an integral function of PR and that should be based on scientific knowledge of the audience and the development of public opinions.

Moreover, Bernays also introduced many persistent PR tactics that are still applicable to persuade the public strategically. One of the popular tactics was 'third party endorsement' in which he used opinion leaders, including experts or scientists to gain public support for products or activities. These tactics work based on the psychological view of 'social proof'. In this principle, people decide what is correct by identifying what other people believe to be valid. Bernays successfully implemented a third-party endorsement approach for American Tobacco company using health professionals to persuade the general public to smoke a cigarette as a method of losing weight Harrison (2011).

Besides, Bernays also illustrated how to develop PR messages within a wider social trend or movement. For instance, there was a social taboo in which tobacco concerning women smoking cigarettes in public in the 1920s. So, he realised that if he could change or challenge that taboo, he should expand the market reach of American Tobacco which was his client Coombs and Holladay (2010). He organised a public protest march, a pseudo-event in which 10 beautiful women walked down in New York during the parade of Ester Day to show that smoking in public was the indication of movement associated with women's liberation instead of a signal of dubious character. Also, he had shown that the PR profession might retain some of the hidden tactics of the press agentry that was its progenitor Hobbs and Mann (2015).

The modern PR profession is not free from criticism and controversies. Certain companies have been accused of implementing PR tactics to manipulate and bury the reality and truths rather than persuading or informing by using honest argumentation and effective use of evidence. For instance, mining companies are knowingly and effectively cultivating goodwill within many societies/communities in which they operate by conducting a 'charm offensive' and providing some financial support to community organisations McKnight and Hobbs (2013). In this way, these companies make it complicated for politicians and governments to develop regulations that may seek to restrict their operations that produce carbon, like the introduction of the carbon tax. Similarly, regulatory issues associated with the mining industry use the PR tactic of advocacy advertising as a component of PR campaigns to reinforce attitudes of the public consistent with organisational position on such issues and to assault reforms of policies within the industry Hobbs and Mann (2015). Whilst PR could be implemented for debatable ends, most practitioners in the PR field and their campaigns are socially responsible, ethical, and useful. Effective PR practitioners should employ two-way communication between the organisation and its public instead of disproportionate communication aimed to persuade and influence the public by overwhelming existing behaviours Grunig et al. (2006).

2.3. PR STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Possibly the most popular scholar in the arena of PR study is James Grunig as he conducted influential research and developed theory in the communication field, among tactics of practitioners and professional standards around the world. As stated by Grunig (1992), there are four models of PR, including the public information model, the press agentry/publicity model, the two-way asymmetric model, and the two-way symmetric model. PR in the press agentry/publicity model seeks to influence public opinions by minimising negative publicity and maximising

positive publicity through frequent use of different tactics such as propaganda, pseudo-events, and tactical persuasion. Conversely, the purpose of PR in the public information model is to disseminate factual information, like while a governmental agency or a business organisation creates informative websites, provides backgrounders, fact sheets, and press releases that can be used by the journalists in news production. These two models presume one-way communication from a governmental agency or an organisation to the public and therefore these models provided limited room or interest in feedback to management from the public Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011). Most PR activities and tactics can be categorised within these two one-way models.

Nevertheless, PR practitioners increasingly seek to provide information about the public to the management alliance within an organisation hence opening two-way communication channels. The two-way asymmetric model of PR is utilised as a way of scientific persuasion, in which PR practitioners utilize social science tools including surveys, focus groups and theories to persuade the public to accept the point of view of an organisation Grunig and Hunt (1984). Feedback to the management is significant, but only in as much as it can be used to inform applicable strategies within spoken and written tactics. Conversely, the purpose of PR in his last two-way symmetric communication model is to gain mutual understanding between an organisation and the public so that the organisational management can avoid conflicts and crises and also maintain the social legitimacy of the company. The PR practitioners in the two-way symmetric model work to ensure a procedure of fair and rational argumentation, thus balancing the power of communication between the organisation and its public Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011).

Grunig's study is also famous for developing the 'excellence theory' of PR. Grunig and his collaborators expanding on his 1984 work on the above models of PR, conducted extensive research on PR departments and their associated activities to explore those practices and values that guided outstanding results for companies/organisations as well as their employees. Whereas all the four PR models were identified in his excellent research. His results indicated that organisations practiced a two-way symmetric model of communication and pursued to align their interests with the public who obtained the highest commercial rewards Grunig et al. (2006).

"PR contributes to organisational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the organisation's goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies. This contribution has monetary value to the organisation. PR contributes to effectiveness by building quality, long-term relations with strategic constituencies" Grunig et al. (2006).

The excellence study by Grunig indicated that PR could proactively manage various challenges that organisations face within their operational environment, including regulation, litigation, negative publicity, and legislation resulting from poor relationships. His study also demonstrated that symmetric communication between managers and employees is mainly significant for avoiding internal crises, including unethical conduct, and industrial relations disputes, and assisted to develop participative culture, which enhanced employee morale and workplace productivity Grunig et al. (2006).

An organisation must consider the role of strategy and how it relates to specific objectives, goals and tactics while deciding on adopting one-way or two-way models of PR. According to Botan (2006), effective PR needs three levels of strategic planning that include grand strategy, strategy, and tactics.

Figure 1

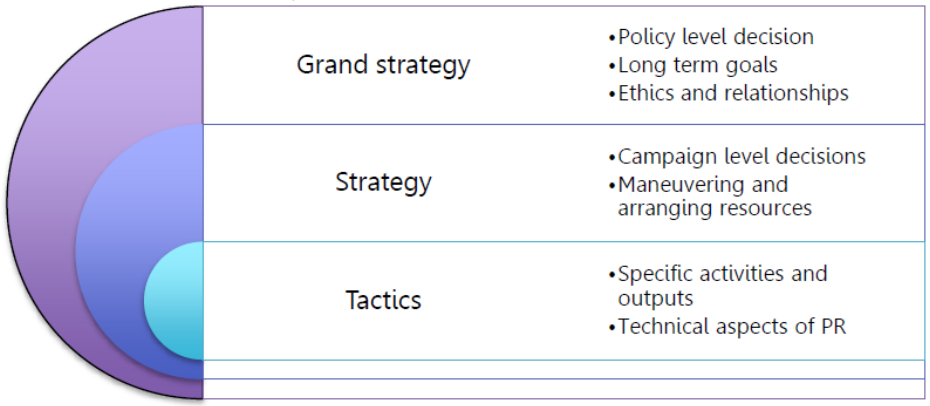

Figure 1 Grand Strategy, Strategy & Tactics in PR
Source: Adapted from Botan (2006)

The grand strategy refers to the organisational policy-level decisions that develop goals, relations with its public, ethics, alignments as well as other forces in its business atmosphere. Strategy refers to the campaign-level decision of an organisation that involves guiding and arranging required resources and arguments to support the grand strategies of the organisation. Finally, tactics refer to specific activities and results through which strategies are instigated that are technical aspects of PR Botan (2006). He also argued that organisational strategies and tactics must be consistent, be aligned with the predominant organisational grand strategy so that positive and stable relationships between the organisation and its strategic public are built during the PR campaigns.

The major public relations strategies and tactics are as follows.

Community Outreach: Community outreach refers to involvement in social planning, education, and support of community activities openly and freely. Community outreach in terms of sustainability allows people with opportunities to involve in their community in different ways that allow them to select and act in the ways that permit them to select and perform in the ways that are most achieving to their neighbours and themselves Satellite Beach (n.d.). Community outreach strategy includes education and outreach. Education includes making people aware of the options they have, and outreach involves directly engaging with their target audiences through involving different social activities Narayanan (2019).

Corporate Citizenship: Corporate citizenship is defined as the commitment of companies or organisations to minimise risks, maximise benefits, be responsive and accountable to various stakeholders and support strong financial results. It is a process of how an organisation exercises its obligations, rights, privileges, and entire corporate responsibility within the local and global environment Boston College (2021). Corporate citizenship goes beyond corporate philanthropy or addressing surface-level sustainability. Responsible organisations at present focus on a range of initiatives that help to address various emerging issues and trends Veleva (2009).

Crisis Management: Crisis refers to different terms, such as catastrophe, business interruption, disaster, contingency, or emergency Herbane (2010). A crisis is a low probability, but high impact event that endangers organisational viability

and is characterised by ambiguity of source, impacts, and means of resolution by the assumption that it requires a swift decision Pearson and Clair (1998). Crisis management is a procedure of preparing for and managing any business interruption, disruption, disaster, or emergency that could affect the image of an organisation and have devastating impacts on different stakeholders Crandall et al. (2014). It is one of the important aspects of public relations strategies. It also involves crisis communication which refers to communication systems, protocols and technologies that facilitate an organisation to effectively communicate during a major crisis.

Consumer Communication: Consumer communication refers to the flow of information about services or products from a company to the consumers. There are three key elements of communication, which are sender, media, and receiver. Consumer communication and persuading consumers is an important aspects of marketing strategy. It generally refers to two-way communication between an organisation and its consumers. It means it also includes gaining feedback and managing complaints from the customers, besides communicating information related to products and services to the consumers Bayle-Tourtoulou and Badoc (2020).

Media Relations: Media relations refers to interactions and communications with media professionals, such as reporters, producers, editors, journalists, etc. Media can be television, newspapers, radio, magazines etc. The goals of media relations are to communicate clients' authentic and trustworthy messages, information, and stories using appropriate media outlets Obrien (2019). Media relations is an important PR strategy that can help to build brand awareness, establish better relationships with the media, increase authenticity and credibility, and control a crisis 3E Public Relations (2019).

External Communications: external communication refers to the transmission of information between an organisation and other organisations or individuals within the external environment. These entities and individuals include suppliers, governmental bodies, customers, shareholders, investors, and society. An external communication strategy helps organisations to communicate their business purpose, brand personality, and their contributions to the public. It can include advertising, brand information presentations, networking strategies, periodical reports, etc. Downs and Adrian (2004).

Collaboration with Influencers: Collaboration with social influencers like famous bloggers, YouTubers, social media influencers, etc. is also an important part of PR strategy. Companies or PR professionals seek to identify effective influencers by market research. Companies generally need to pay the influencers for posts associated with their brand and the organisation. It requires finding an appropriate influencer to promote or publicise the business, setting a budget and management strategy, making the decision on goals and messages, and reaching effective influencers Chen (2020).

Event Sponsorships: An event sponsorship is a process of sponsoring an event generally by proving funds in exchange for something valuable to the organisation, which could be increased brand exposure, speaking opportunities, attendee data, etc. It also refers to a way of publicising a brand by supporting or sponsoring an event financially for the aim of brand exposure to highly engaged audiences. This means event sponsorship helps companies in brand interactions, media exposure, direct engagement, brand prestige, brand awareness, brand recognition, etc. Lunt and Nicotra (2019).

Social Media and Blogging: social media and blogging are considered the emerging approach to public relations. Social media strategy includes creating social media pages on different social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, etc., seeking to increase social followers, likes etc. The main aim of social media strategy for PR is to increase brand exposure and audience engagements through effective and valuable content including texts, visuals, and videos Kent and Taylor (2014). Similarly, blogging includes the creation of a separate blog page on the company's website and publishing effective, persuasive, and informative posts regarding a brand and a company. It also includes sharing the blog posts on different social media to gain higher views and better customer engagements. Blogging is also a significant PR strategy as it is its own media channel and helps to demonstrate brand expertise and reputation. It also increases website traffic and visibility and is a fast technique to share updates and news Vzesniauskaite (2019).

In this research, seven strategies of PR including corporate citizenship, crisis management, consumer communications, media relations, collaboration with influencers, event sponsorships and social media strategies are used in the context of evaluating Nike's PR strategies based on customers' perceptions.

2.4. PR STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY NIKE

The general PR strategies of Nike focus on the above-discussed approach including community outreach, crisis management, consumer communications, media relations, collaboration with influencers, event sponsorships and social media strategies. The company is seeking to become a corporate citizen by focusing on minimising risks and being accountable and responsible to the community and stakeholders. The company has also demonstrated its commitments to emerging global environmental issues, such as global warming and climate change Pratap (2018). The company also participated in sports sponsoring activities by providing financial support, various corporate social responsibility practices, and significant use of social media to gain brand awareness and recognition and to develop a positive public image Knauff (2018). Nike has also shown its commitments in terms of sustainable practices to gain positive publicity and overcome different controversies. These practices include a change in its working environments, use of recycled materials, and workers' safety in its factory and production sites. Some products of Nike including its 'Air' products are considered the most sustainable innovations in the history of Nike. Currently, around 75% of Nike's apparel and shoes contain some sort of recycled materials. Its innovation in Air manufacturing facilitates the company in diverting more than 95% of production wastes from landfills were 51 million pounds of waste materials from 2016 to 2017 Nike News (2018). The company is seeking to focus on these aspects and communicate its approaches, contributions, and commitments through various channels, such as the Nike News platform, social media, and enhanced media relations.

There were two major public relations crises faced by Nike in 2019 that could have a significant devastating impact on the company's reputation if they were not handled effectively. The first crisis was on 20 February 2019 during the US college basketball games of the season. The company suffered a high level of embarrassment while a stat player Zion Williamson got a knee strain after his Nike PG 2.5 shoe tear Ferris (2019). Nike seemed to be highly responsive to managing and handling the crisis and it immediately issued a statement acknowledging that the company was highly concerned with the situation and wished for quick recovery of the player and stated that it is working to investigate the issue. The company's PR

team was careful to express that it was an isolated accident. It also stated that the performance and quality of products are of 'utmost importance to the organisation. The second important PR crisis for Nike in 2019 was 'Nike Maternity Leave'. Nike was committed to positioning it as a responsible and socially progressive company and it has partnered with reputable individuals in the arena of social justice. The company's endorsement reimbursement during the period of maternity leave was viewed against Nike's corporate values and there were substantial complaints from athletes and fans. The company's PR team significantly reacted to the issue and immediately promised to change its corporate policies associated with this issue. Nike has also verified that already made significant changes to reduce crisis impact Torossian (2019).

In addition to the above crisis management strategies, the company also uses social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Youtube. Nike has 209 million followers on Instagram, 36,709,498 followers on Facebook, 9 million followers on Twitter, and 1.68 million YouTube subscribers as of 3 April 2022. The company's media relations approach focuses on gaining positive media coverage through different strategies and tactics, including media releases, media briefings, backgrounders, media kits etc. Gregory (2018). Thus, these PR strategies have significantly helped the company to gain a positive reputation, manage crises, gain positive media coverage, and significantly helped the company in long-term business success and financial health.

2.5. CONCEPTS OF CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

American Marketing Association (n.d.) defines the brand as a name, symbol, design, term, or any other feature that helps to identify one company's products or services as different from those of competitors. Therefore, a brand is not the same as a product or service. Brand equity is an important aspect of a brand. Every company aims to develop a reputable brand with strong positive brand equity. The term brand equity denotes consumers' perceptions of a particular brand, and if a consumer has a higher extent of association with a brand, it indicates a higher degree of brand equity Trott and Sople (2016). Kevin Lane Keller, a famous brand researcher defined brand equity as a differential effect of knowledge of a brand on customer response to different activities of the brand. Brand equity is a utility that a customer relates to the consumption and use of a brand Vazquez et al. (2002). Brand equity is also defined as a set of characteristics that help to make a brand unique in the market. It also helps to allow the company to charge a premium price and maintain a higher market share compared with unbranded products. There are different types of brand equity, including employee-based, customer-based, and financial-based Baalbaki (2012). This study focuses only on customer-based brand equity.

The CBBE is the dominant perspective of cognitive psychology, which is highly preferred by most practitioners and academicians in marketing studies. According to Keller (2003), CBBE occurs while a customer is familiar with a brand and retains some strong, favourable, and unique associations of the brand in their mind. Positive CBBE has various benefits, including consumers' willingness to seek out the brand in new distribution channels, long-term consistent revenues, the effectiveness of marketing communications, and helps companies to charge higher prices. Therefore, CBBE lies in minds of customers, which is the essence of what customers have learnt, seen, heard, and felt about a particular brand over time Jillapalli and Jillapalli (2014).

Similarly, Kotler and Keller (2006) stated that brand equity is a bridge between investments in marketing to create the brand and brand knowledge among customers. Moreover, Yasin et al. (2007) refers brand equity as customers' favouritism towards the focal brand regarding their purchase intention, preference and choice among competitive brands that offer a similar level of product/service benefits that are perceived by the customers. CBBE also includes customer perceptions and consumer behaviour approaches. The customer perceptions approach includes brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality Finkle (2018). The consumer behavioural approach includes brand loyalty and price difference Myers (2003). Brand loyalty in this aspect denotes positive links attached to consumers to a specific brand, which can be exhibited by repurchase intention even when alternative products are available Koop (2019).

Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity Model

Keller's CBBE model is a popular model of brand equity that was published in his book entitled "Strategic Brand Management". This model assumes that to build a strong brand, we must shape customers' thinking and feelings toward products and services. The company needs to develop a favourable experience of the brand so that consumers have positive thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions regarding the brand.

Figure 2

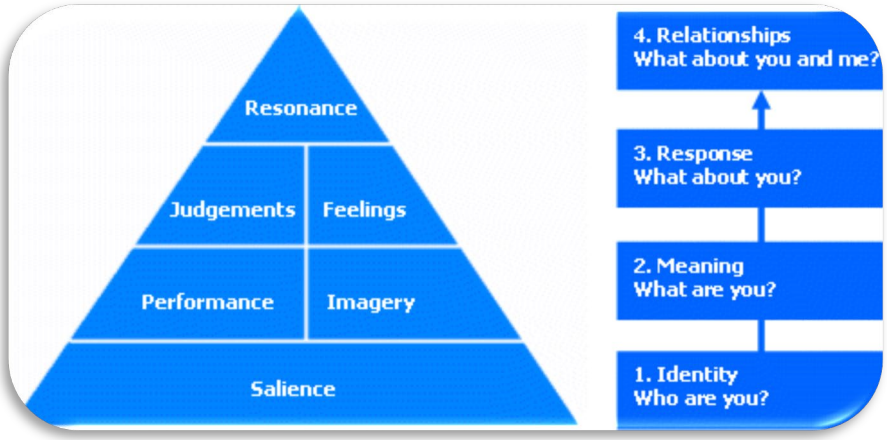

Figure 2 Keller's CBBE Equity Model
Source Adapted from Keller (2001)

The above pyramidical model illustrates the four stages that should be followed to develop strong brand equity. At stage 1, it is required to create brand salience or brand awareness. The company needs to make sure that the associated brand is stand out from the competition, and customers are aware of the brand and appropriately recognise it. In the second stage, it is required to identify and communicate the meaning of the brand, what it stands for, etc. it includes imagery and performance. Imagery indicates how well a brand fulfils the needs of customers on a psychological and social level. Performance means how well products and services meet the need and expectations of customers. The third stage includes consumers' responses towards the brand including judgement and feelings. Customers consistently make brand judgements based on perceived and actual quality, credibility, consideration, and superiority. Customers also judge a brand

based on how it makes them feel. This means a brand should induce direct feelings, but the consumer also responds to how a brand makes them feel about themselves emotionally. At the fourth stage or top of the pyramid, we need to achieve brand resonance while customers feel a deep psychological connection with a particular brand. This model categorised resonance into four types that are behavioural loyalty, attitudinal loyalty, sense of community and active engagement Keller (2003).

2.6. DIMENSIONS OF CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

Different researchers have implemented different dimensions to measure brand equity. One of the popular approaches to brand equity measurement is Aaker's brand equity model which includes five dimensions brand awareness, brand associations brand loyalty, perceived quality, and other proprietary brands such as channel relationships, trademarks, patents, etc. Aaker (2009). The four elements of the Aaker model are used to measure CBBE in this study, which are as follows.

Brand Awareness: Brand awareness is one of the most important elements of CBBE. It refers to the capability of a potential customer to recognise a product from a brand by its name Aaker (2009). It is also defined as how customers in the market remember or recognise a company or a brand. Greater brand awareness leads to higher familiarity with the brand logo, products, and services from a company. This higher brand awareness helps brands in many ways, including customers having knowledge about the business, social media users recognise ads from the brand with higher awareness, customers choosing products from the particular brand even cheaper options available in the market, and search engine users often type company or brand name Aaker and Biel (2013).

Brand Associations: Brand association is anything that comes from customers' memory of a specific brand. It includes product characteristics, product classes, benefits to the customers, users, competitors, lifestyle, etc. Therefore, the brand association helps customers retrieve or process information, provides a reason to purchase, the basis for differentiations and extensions, and helps to develop positive feelings towards the brand. This means brand association helps to make purchase decisions through processing, retrieving, and organising information in their memory Aaker (2009).

Brand Loyalty: Brand loyalty helps companies by generating values by reducing costs for marketing communication and leveraging trade. It refers to a positive connection involved to the consumers to a specific product or a brand. Loyalty can be displayed through frequent purchases while there is significant availability of alternate products/services. Loyalty appears when a consumer continues to buy goods and services from a company that is not because it is the only option, but because they have trust in the company Aaker and Biel (2013).

Perceived quality: Perceived quality refers to customers' judgements about a product/service's overall superiority or excellence Zeithaml (1988). It provides value for the customers in terms of giving reason to purchase, being the basis of line extension, attracting channel member interest, differentiating the brand, and supporting the company to change the premium price Aaker and Biel (2013).

2.7. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

The following research framework has been developed from the review of the literature associated with PR strategies and CBBE. The seven dimensions of PR strategy and four dimensions of CBBE are used in this study.

Figure 3

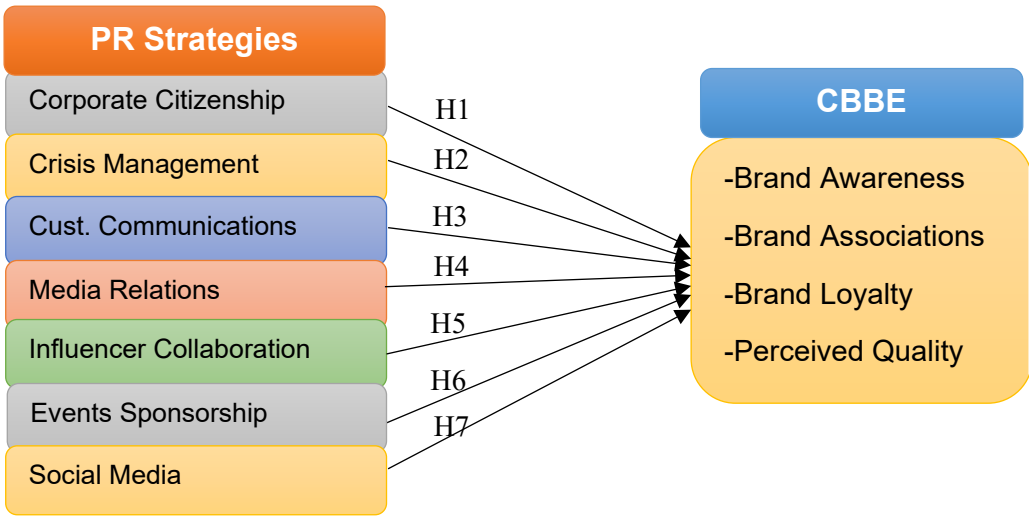

Figure 3 Research Framework

The following hypotheses have been developed from the above literature review.

H1: Corporate citizenship has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

H2: Crisis management has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

H3: Customer communication has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

H4: Media relations has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

H5: Influencer collaboration has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

H6: Event sponsorship has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

H7: social media has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy is a viewpoint or framework that guides entire research procedures, methods and approaches based on outlook regarding developing assumptions, nature of knowledge and reality Collins and Hussey (2014). The assumptions are a preliminary statement of reasoning, which is founded on philosophical insights and knowledge of the researcher. Saunders et al. (2019) categorised research philosophies into four types that are interpretivism, positivism, realism, and pragmatism. This study followed positivism philosophy, which believes that the social world can only be understood through an objective technique. It assumes that actual knowledge is gained through trustworthy mathematical, and scientific measurements and observations. Researchers using this philosophy should focus on reality and facts through some scientific verifications. This philosophy is chosen in this research because of the following reasons Wilson (2014).

- It relies on quantitative measurement of data which assures a low level of biasedness.
- It focuses on a quantitative technique that is more scientific than a qualitative technique, which means the research results are more trustworthy.

- It facilitates well-defined structures during the research process, and therefore there is minimal room for bias and error.
- It assures more accurate results as it derives from experiments and hypotheses testing through already verified test statistics.

3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH

According to Saunders et al. (2019), there are three main approaches to research, which are induction, deduction, and abduction. The deduction approach was implemented in this study. The deductive approach is defined as deriving a research result by reasoning. The procedure of deduction is the development of a research conclusion based on generally accepted hypotheses. Deduction starts with an existing theory, development of hypotheses through theory, collection of data to test these hypotheses, and analysis of data and results to test hypotheses Saunders et al. (2019). So, deduction reasoning is implemented in this study as it is guided by positivism philosophy, it supports a larger sample size, quantitative approach to data analysis, and testing hypotheses by using scientific techniques. Seven hypotheses were developed from the basis of existing literature associated with PR strategies and CBBE and the remaining research procedure was guided by testing hypotheses.

3.3. RESEARCH STRATEGY

As this research is guided by positivism and objective technique, a survey strategy has been implemented to collect data from the customers of Nike in the UK. The questionnaire instrument has been used to conduct a survey in this study. The survey is a common research strategy to answer what, where, who, how much and how many questions. Surveys allow the collection of a large amount of data from the larger population. The data obtained from questionnaire surveys are highly standardised and allow easy comparison and analysis through statistical software for quantitative data. This means it allows the collection of quantitative data that can be easily analysed through inferential and descriptive statistics Saunders et al. (2019).

The survey strategy is chosen in this research as it helps to collect data from a large number of Nike customers by using a questionnaires tool. Large sample data is more reliable and valid in terms of representing population characteristics. It also facilitates data analysis through statistical software. Survey data obtained through questionnaires can be less time-consuming while analysing data. Surveys can also be conducted through online tools, such as social media, emails, QR codes, and specially designed survey websites, including Survey Monkey, Online Survey, Kwik Survey etc. The Kwik Survey online website has been used to collect primary data from Nike customers in this research. This tool has been selected as it provides flexibility, a higher response rate, and automation in data input and handling Sincero (2012). This research has implemented mostly closed-ended questionnaires with fixed alternatives related to Nike's PR strategies and customer-based brand equity.

3.4. RESEARCH POPULATION, SAMPLING & SAMPLE SIZE

The research population in this research is the set of customers of Nike based in the UK. The customers could be anyone who purchased products from Nike recently or in the past. The customers were from any background, but they were above 18 years old. This study has adopted a convenience sampling method in which

a sample of individuals can be selected based on accessibility to the researcher. It also includes the selection of samples based on the interest of participants Kothari (2014). This means a sample of Nike customers has been chosen based on accessibility for the researcher or they are easily available to answer questionnaires designed for this research. This method is more applicable for this research as there is no list of Nike customers (research population) available for the researcher and therefore, it is complicated to use the probability sampling technique. Instead, this study has collected data from the customers of Nike who were easily accessible to the researcher, including friends, family members, friends of friends on social media and voluntarily available participants to answer the research questionnaires. This study has considered a limited sample of 151 customers who answered all questions out of 160 attempts, while the other nine partially answered responses were removed from the data set.

3.5. COLLECTION OF DATA

This study has collected primary data from the customers of Nike in the UK. The online questionnaire survey too was implemented to collect primary data. A questionnaire is a tool for collecting some sort of statistical information directly from the research population regarding their attributes, actions of the population, attitudes, perceptions, etc. by using a series of questions associated with the research problem. The questionnaire method has many advantages that include cost saving, scalability, usefulness to reach respondents quickly, the anonymity of respondents, flexibility for the survey respondents over when and where to answer the questions, and higher accuracy of statistical data. However, the questionnaire method can also have some limitations, including differences in understanding and interpretation of answers, respondents could leave unanswered, difficult to observe emotions and feelings, issues of accessibility, respondents could answer questions superficially and questionnaires fatigue Cleave (2021).

The questionnaires in this study include different dimensions of PR strategies and customer-based brand equity. Different types of questions, such as the Likert scale, yes/no questions, fixed alternatives, basic demographic questions, and some open-ended questions. So, the questionnaire was programmed on the Kwik Survey website and the survey link was shared through social media, email, and messenger to reach customers of Nike in the UK. The survey was launched on 10 October 2021 and closed on 30 October 2021, which means the data was collected within 3 weeks period.

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The primary data gathered from the customers of Nike through an online questionnaire survey have been exported in the form of a spreadsheet and imported into SPSS for statistical analysis. Different mathematical tools like percentages, frequencies, and charts, including bar graphs and pie charts, were used to analyse general demographic responses. But the evaluation of the PR strategies of Nike and customer-based brand equity of Nike has been analysed through arithmetic mean and standard deviation. Mean score evaluation is a popular measure of central tendency in statistics. It helps to locate central values within the data set. This means that if a mean score is more than 3 on a five-point Likert scale, it can be considered a positive agreement by the respondents. Similarly, standard deviation measures how the set of data is spread out. The relationships between these two variables were analysed through correlation and regression analysis. Correlations show the

interrelationships between the two variables. Similarly, regression analysis was used to analyse the impacts of PR strategies on customer-based brand equity in this study.

3.7. RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

The reliability of the research instrument implemented in this study was measured through Cronbach's alpha, which is a useful measure of internal consistency or reliability of the set of test items or set of scales. The reliability of any measurement tool denotes the degree to which it is a consistent measure of a concept and Cronbach's alpha is a useful approach to measure the strengths of consistency University of Virginia Library (2021).

The values of Cronbach's alpha for each dimension of PR strategies and CBBE are presented in the following table.

Table 1

Table 1 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Dimensions	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Corporate Citizenship	3	0.920
Crisis Management	3	0.908
Customer Communications	2	0.846
Media Relations	2	0.749
Influencers Collaboration	2	0.627
Events Sponsorships	2	0.838
Social Media	2	0.874
Overall PR Strategy	**16**	**0.961**
Brand Awareness	3	0.905
Brand Associations	3	0.840
Brand Loyalty	3	0.949
Perceived Quality	3	0.948
Overall CBBE	**12**	**0.972**

The table presented above indicates that each dimension of PR strategy and CBBE has a value of alpha of more than 0.700, except influencer collaboration. However, the overall PR strategy has a value of Cronbach's alpha 0.961 and overall CBBE has a value of Cronbach's alpha 0.972, which indicates higher reliability of this research instrument and higher reliability of the scale used in the questionnaire for this study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. GENDER OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The frequency and percentage of different genders who participated in this survey are presented in the following Table 1.

Table 2

Table 2 Genders

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	75	49.7%
Female	71	47.0%
Others	0	0.0%
Prefer not to answer	5	3.3%
Total	151	100%

The above results are presented in the following pie chart.

Figure 4

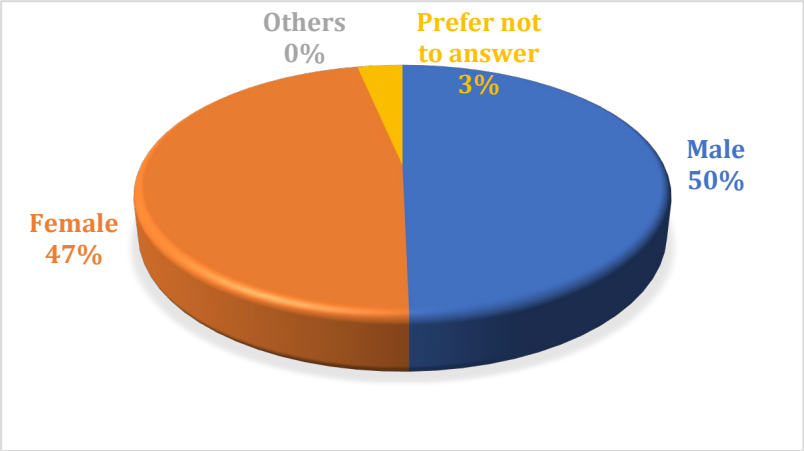

Figure 4 Genders
Source: Author

It indicates that the percentage of males is around 50% of the total participation in this survey while there is 47% female. Out of 151 participants, 3% prefer not no answer the questions and no participation from other categories.

4.2. AGE GROUP

This survey requested to answer the questions if the participants are more than 18 years. Different age groups of respondents are presented as follows.

Table 3

Table 3 Age Groups

Age Groups	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 – 27	31	20.5%
28 – 36	71	47.0%
37 – 45	30	19.9%
46 – 54	12	7.9%
Above 54	7	4.6%

Total	151	100%

The percentages of different age groups are presented in the following figure.

Figure 5

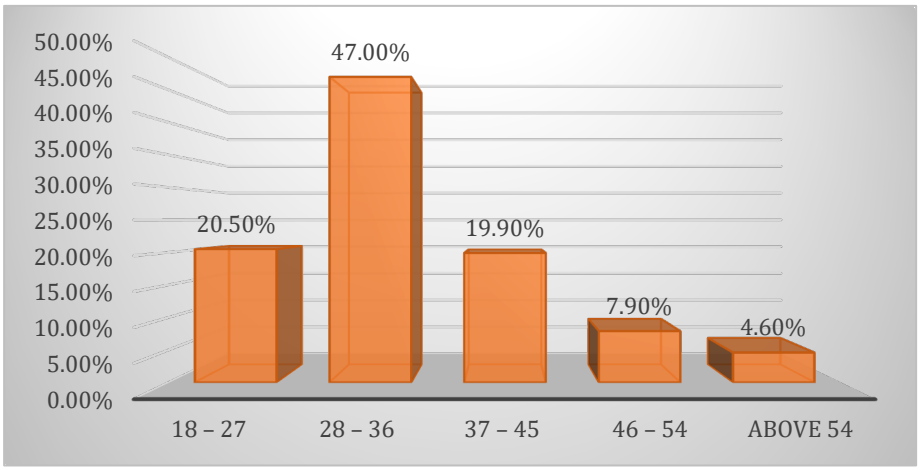

Figure 5 Age Group
Source: Author

The above presentation shows that the highest percentage of Nike customers who participated in this survey are from the 28-36 age group which is 47%, while the lowest percentage is above 54, which is just 4.60% of the total 151 participation. Similarly, percentage of participation from 18-27 is 20.50%, 37-45 is 19.90% and 46-54 is 7.90%. These data indicate that most young customers prefer the Nike brand.

4.3. FREQUENCY OF PURCHASE FROM NIKE BRAND

The customers' responses regarding their frequency of purchase from Nike are presented in the following table.

Table 4

Table 4 Frequency of Purchase

Frequency of Purchase	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never (after the first purchase)	15	9.9%
Once a month	42	27.8%
More than once a month	29%	19.2%
Once a year	65	43.0%
Total	151	100%

The percentage of frequency of purchase is presented in the following figure.

Figure 6

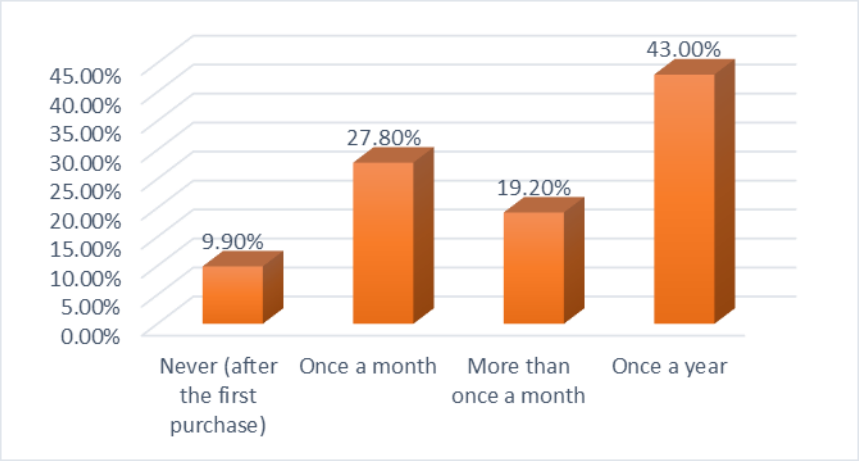

Figure 6 Frequency of Purchase
Source: Author

The figure indicates that the highest percentage of customers prefer to purchase Nike products once a year which is 43%, while 9.9% of customers never purchase Nike products after their first purchase. There are 27.80% of customers who purchase Nike products once a month and 19.20% of customers purchase Nike products more than once a month.

4.4. HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO RECOMMEND NIKE'S PRODUCTS?

The responses of survey participants regarding their likelihood of recommendations of Nike products to their friends and family members are presented in the following table.

Table 5

Table 5 Likelihood to Recommend

Constructs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Extremely Unlikely	3	2.0%
Unlikely	12	7.9%
Neutral	18	11.9%
Likely	75	49.7%
Extremely Likely	43	28.5%
Total	151	100%

The percentages of customers' likelihood to recommend to their friends and family members are shown in the following figure.

Figure 7

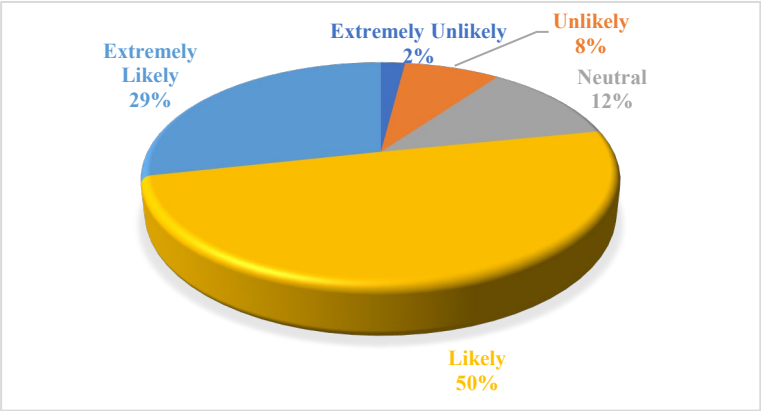

Figure 7 Likelihood to Recommend
Source: Author

The figure indicates that the highest of 50% of customers who participated in this survey said that they are likely to recommend while 2% of customers were extremely unlikely to recommend Nike products to others. There are 29% of customers who extremely like to recommend, 8% unlikely to recommend and 12% of customers are neutral on this matter. If we combine likely and extremely likely it would be 79% of customers who have the likelihood to recommend Nike products to their friends and family members. This means Nike's customers have a significant level of customer loyalty based on the recommendation to others.

4.5. MOSTLY PREFERRED SPORTSWEAR BRAND

The following table represents the customers' responses regarding their most preferred sportswear brand in the UK.

Table 6

Table 6 Mostly Preferred Sportswear Brand

Brands	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nike	93	61.6%
Adidas	18	11.9%
Rebook	7	4.6%
Under Armour	5	3.3%
Timberland	7	4.6%
Puma	5	3.3%
The North Face	6	4.0%
Others	10	6.6%
Total	151	100%

The percentages of customers who mostly preferred the above sportswear brand are represented in the following pie chart.

Figure 8

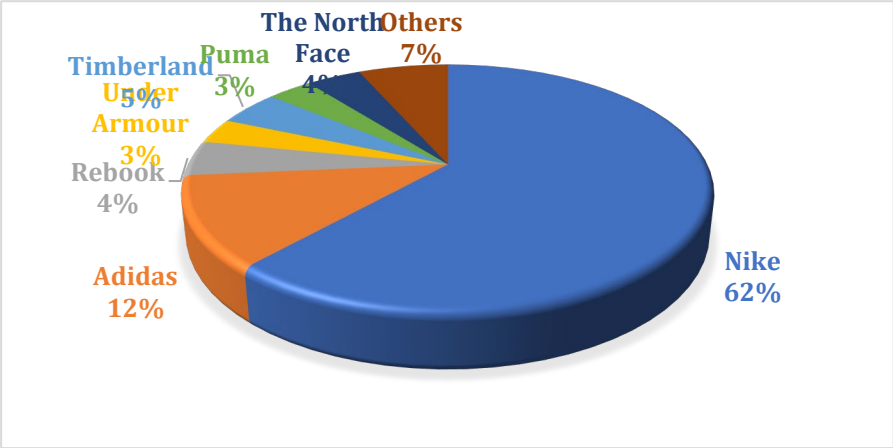

Figure 8 Mostly Preferred Sportswear Brand
Source: Author

The pie chart illustrates that 62% of customers mostly prefer the Nike brand among other sportswear brands, whereas 3% of customers prefer Puma and Under Armour. Similarly, 12% prefer Adidas, 4% prefer to Rebook, and 5% prefer Timberland. This figure indicates that sportswear customers in the UK mostly prefer the Nike brand.

4.6. EVALUATION OF PR STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY NIKE IN THE UK

PR strategies followed by Nike in the UK are analysed through different seven dimensions based on customers' rating or their perceptions. A five-point rating scale was used on the questionnaires to evaluate Nike's PR strategies. The mean and standard deviation of the scores for seven dimensions of PR strategies are presented in the following table.

Table 7

Table 7 Mean and SD of the Scores for PR Strategies

PR Strategies	Mean	SD
Corporate Citizenship	3.53	0.79
Crisis Management	3.69	0.74
Customer Communication	3.85	0.75
Media Relations	3.81	0.70
Influencer Collaborations	3.86	0.66
Event Sponsorships	3.96	0.62
Social Media	3.88	0.68
Overall PR Strategy	3.80	0.61

The above table shows that all the dimensions of PR strategies have a mean score of more than 3 on a five-point rating scale. The highest mean score is 3.96 out

of 5 obtained for event sponsorship, which means event sponsorship is the most significant element of Nike's PR strategy. The smallest mean score is 3.53 obtained in corporate citizenship which means Nike is behind on maintaining sustainability issues and lacks in being accountable and responsible to its stakeholders. Similarly, crisis management has a mean score of 3.69, customer communication has a mean score of 3.85, media relations have 3.81, influencer collaboration has 3.86, and social media has 3.88. All the mean scores are higher than the neutral value 3.

Similarly, the standard deviation of the scores for PR strategy dimensions lies between 0.61 and 0.79, which represents a low variation of scores from the customers for these dimensions.

Thus, the analysis of the mean and standard deviation of the rating scores for seven dimensions of PR strategy shows that each element has a mean score of more than 3 with an overall mean score of 3.80 ± 0.61 (mean ± SD). It represents 76% of agreements by the customers who participated in the survey. This indicates that PR strategies implemented by Nike are significantly effective based on customers' perceptions.

4.7. EVALUATION OF NIKE'S CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

The CBBE of Nike is also analysed through the mean and standard deviation of the scores gained on the five-point rating scale. Different four dimensions are used to evaluate Nike's CBBE in the UK.

Table 8

Table 8 Mean & SD of the Scores for CBBE Dimensions

PR Strategies	Mean	SD
Brand Awareness	3.94	0.80
Brand Associations	4.02	0.74
Brand Loyalty	3.85	0.88
Perceived Quality	4.00	0.77
Overall CBBE	3.95	0.75

The above table shows that all the four dimensions of CBBE have mean scores of more than 3 on a five-point rating scale. The highest mean score is 4.02 for brand association and the lowest mean score is 3.85 for brand loyalty. This means brand association among other elements of CBBE is the most significant factor in the case of Nike. The mean score for perceived quality is at the second rank, which means customers perceive Nike's products as high-quality products in the UK. The mean score for brand awareness is 3.94 and overall CBBE has a mean score of 3.95.

Similarly, the standard deviation of the rating scores for CBBE dimensions ranges between 0.74 and 0.88, which indicates a low dispersion of scores or low variation of scores gained in the rating scale.

Thus, it shows from the evaluation of mean and SD for the scores of CBBE dimensions that each element has a mean score of more than 3 with the overall mean score for CBBE being 3.95 ± 0.75 (mean ± SD). It indicates 79% agreement by the customers based on their perceptions of the four dimensions of CBBE. Therefore, Nike has been significantly managing its customer-based brand equity in the UK.

4.8. EXAMINING THE IMPACTS OF PR STRATEGIES ON CBBE

The relationship between PR strategies and customer-based brand equity dimensions is analysed through correlation analysis and regression analysis. In this section, all seven hypotheses are tested through regression analysis.

4.8.1. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

The intercorrelation between dimensions of PR strategies and overall CBBE is computed as follows.

Table 9

Table 9 Correlation between PR Dimensions of Strategies & CBBE

Correlations

	Corporate Citizenship	Crisis Management	Customer Communication	Media Relations	Influencer Collaboration	Event Sponsorship	Social Media	Overall PR Strategy	Overall CBBE
Corporate Citizenship	1								
Crisis Management	.822**	1							
Customer Communication	.750**	.851**	1						
Media Relations	.650**	.753**	.771**	1					
Influencer Collaboration	.575**	.643**	.670**	.739**	1				
Event Sponsorship	.494**	.587**	.596**	.669**	.798**	1			
Social Media	.693**	.746**	.793**	.774**	.799**	.720**	1		
Overall PR Strategy	.834**	.899**	.902**	.882**	.851**	.788**	.908**	1	
Overall CBBE	.700**	.693**	.719**	.695**	.726**	.639**	.783**	.817**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation table shows that each element of PR strategy and overall customer-based brand equity are significantly intercorrelated with each other. All the correlations are positive and significant at the 0.01 level. The correlation between corporate citizenship and overall CBBE is 0.700, crisis management and overall CBBE is 0.693, customer communication and overall CBBE is 0.719, media relations and overall CBBE is 0.695, influencer collaboration and overall CBBE is 0.726, event sponsorship and overall CBBE is 0.639, and social media and overall CBBE is 0.783, which all are highly significant at the 0.01 level. Similarly, the correlation between overall PR strategy and overall CBBE is 0.817 which is also highly significant and positive.

4.8.2. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Regression analysis is a useful measure to analyse the impacts of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The impact of PR strategies on customer-based brand equity is analysed through regression analysis.

H1: Corporate citizenship has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

The regression coefficient between corporate citizenship and overall CBBE is presented in the following Table 10.

Table 10

Table 10 Coefficients of Regression between Corporate Citizenship & CBBE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.593	.202		7.886	.000
	Corporate Citizenship	.667	.056	.700	11.975	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Overall CBBE

From the above, standardised coefficient Beta = 0.700 means corporate citizenship and CBBE are significantly correlated with each other. Its shows that the value of p is 0.00 which is less than 0.05. This means corporate citizenship has significant positive impacts on CBBE with p = 0.000 and β = 0.700.

Therefore H1: Corporate citizenship has significant positive impacts on CBBE, is accepted.

H2: Crisis management has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

The regression coefficients between crisis management and overall CBBE are presented in the following Table 11.

Table 11

Table 11 Coefficients of Regression between Crisis Management & CBBE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.360	.226		6.029	.000
	Crisis Management	0.702	0.06	0.693	11.721	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Overall CBBE

In the above table, standardised coefficient beta is 0.693 which indicates a highly significant positive correlation between crisis management and overall CBBE. Similarly, the value of sig (p) = 0.000 indicates a significant positive impact of crisis management on overall CBBE as it is less than 0.05. Therefore, crisis management has significant positive impacts on CBBE with β = 0.693 and p = 0.000.

Therefore, H2: Crisis management has significant positive impacts on CBBE, is also accepted.

H3: Customer communication has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

The coefficients of regression between customer communication and overall CBBE are presented in the following Table 12.

Table 12

Table 12 Coefficient of Regression between Customer Communication and CBBE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.159	0.225		5.15	0
	Customer Communication	0.726	0.057	0.719	12.643	0

a. Dependent Variable: Overall CBBE

In the above table, the value of standardised coefficient beta is 0.719 indicates a significant positive relationship between customer communication and overall CBBE. Similarly, the value of sig. (p) = 0.000 indicates that customer communication has significant positive impact on CBBE as it is less than 0.05. Thus, its shows that customer communication has significant positive impacts on CBBE with $\beta = 0.719$ and $p = 0.000$.

Therefore, H3 is also accepted.

H4: Media relations have significant positive impacts on CBBE.

The regression coefficients between media relations and overall CBBE are presented in the following Table 13.

Table 13

Table 13 Coefficients of Regression between Media Relations and CBBE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.115	0.245		4.557	0
	Media Relations	0.745	0.063	0.695	11.792	0

a. Dependent Variable: Overall CBBE

The standardised coefficient beta in the above table is 0.695, which indicates significant positive relationships between media relations and overall CBBE. Similarly, the value of sig (p) = 0.000 shows that media relations have significant positive impacts on CBBE as the value of p is less than 0.05. Thus, media relations have significant positive impacts on CBBE with $\beta = 0.695$ and $p = 0.000$.

Therefore, H4 is also accepted.

H5: Influencer collaboration has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

The regression coefficients between influencer collaboration and overall CBBE are presented in the following Table 14.

Table 14

Table 14 Regression Coefficients between Influence Collaboration and CBBE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.741	0.253		2.932	0.004
	Influencer Collaboration	0.833	0.065	0.726	12.892	0

a. Dependent Variable: Overall CBBE

The standardised coefficient beta in the above table is 0.726, which indicates significant positive relationships between influencer collaboration and overall CBBE. Similarly, the value of sig. (p) = 0.000 indicates that influencer collaboration has significant impact on overall CBBE. Thus, influencer collaboration has significant positive impacts on CBBE with β = 0.726 and p = 0.000.

Therefore, H5 is also accepted.

H6: Event sponsorship has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

The coefficients of regression between event sponsorships and overall CBBE are presented in the following Table 15.

Table 15

Table 15 Regression Coefficients between Event Sponsorships and CBBE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.859	0.309		2.784	0.006
	Event Sponsorship	0.781	0.077	0.639	10.148	0

a. Dependent Variable: Overall CBBE

The standardised coefficient beta in the above table is 0.639 which indicates significant positive relationships between event sponsorships and overall CBBE. Similarly, sig. (p) = 0.000 indicates that event sponsorship has a significant impact on overall CBBE. Thus, event sponsorship has significant positive impacts on CBBE with β = 0.639 and p = 0.000.

Therefore, H6 is also accepted.

H7: social media has significant positive impacts on CBBE.

The coefficients of regression between social media and overall CBBE are presented in the following Table 16.

Table 16

Table 16 Coefficients of Regression between social media **and CBBE**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.(p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.568	0.223		2.544	0.012
	Social Media	0.871	0.057	0.783	15.38	0

a. Dependent Variable: Overall CBBE

The standardised coefficient beta in the above table is 0.783, which indicates significant positive correlations between social media and overall CBBE. Similarly, sig. (p) = 0.000, which indicates that social media has significant positive impacts on overall CBBE as p is less than 0.05. Thus, social media has significant positive impacts on CBBE with β = 0.783 and p = 0.000.

Therefore, H7 is also accepted.

Now, let us check the overall impacts of PR strategies on overall CBBE.

Table 17

Table 17 Coefficients of Regression between overall PR strategies and CBBE

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.13	0.224		0.578	0.564
	Overall PR Strategy	1.007	0.058	0.817	17.28	0

a. Dependent Variable: Overall CBBE

The standardised coefficient beta in the above table is 0.817, which represents significant correlations between the overall PR strategies of Nike and overall CBBE. Similarly, sig. (p) = 0.000 indicates that overall PR strategies have significant impacts on overall CBBE as the value of p is less than 0.05.

Thus, the above correlation and regression analysis show that the PR strategies of Nike and customer-based brand equity are intercorrelated with each other and overall PR strategies have significant positive impacts on CBBE with β = 0.817 and p = 0.000.

4.9. DISCUSSIONS

This research was designed to critically examine the impacts of PR strategies on the customer-based brand equity of Nike by evaluating the perceptions of Nike's customers in the UK. It has also evaluated the overall PR strategies of Nike and the overall CBBE of the Nike brand based on customers' perceptions.

This study identified from the analysis of the mean and standard deviation of the rating scores for seven dimensions of PR strategy that each element has a mean score of more than 3 with an overall mean score of 3.80. It represents 76% of agreements by the customers who participated in the survey. This indicates that PR strategies implemented by Nike are significantly effective based on customers' perceptions. These current findings are consistent with Nike's current approach to PR. According to Knauff (2018), Nike participated in sports sponsoring activities, maintaining corporate social responsibility practices, significant use of social media to gain brand awareness, and developing a positive public image. Nike has also demonstrated its commitment to emerging global environmental issues, such as global warming and climate change Pratap (2018). Nike had successfully managed different crises in history, including the two major crises faced in 2019 through its appropriate PR strategies. Nike seemed to be highly responsive to managing and handling the crisis and it immediately issued a statement acknowledging that it is highly concerned with the situation and wished for quick recovery of the player and stated that it is working to investigate the issue.

Similarly, the analysis of the mean and standard deviation of the rating scores for the dimensions of CBBE shows that each dimension has a mean score of more than 3, and the overall mean score for CBBE is 3.95. Therefore, Nike has a significant level of CBBE based on customers' perceptions in the UK. These findings are consistent with many reports and studies about Nike's brand. According to Brand Finance (2021), Nike has retained the most valuable apparel brand for the 7th consecutive year in the world, regardless of its brand value being reduced by 13% of the world. Similarly, according to Lin (2017), despite various controversies, Nike is still one of the most valuable and recognisable brands in the world. She added that Nike is a strong and well-established brand that is a well-recognised and distinguished apparel and sportswear brand. Its brand name and slogan "Just do it" are highly memorable to customers around the world. Nike has successfully implemented athlete endorsement to enhance its brand awareness and gained significant success to develop its brand awareness among global customers. The company's commitment to producing high-quality products as it designs products based on high standards of professional competition. The sportswear products are highly durable and have high performance. Perceived quality perceptions of Nike have been developed as potential customers see a winning player wearing Nike's shoes in large professional sporting events, which helps to change customers' perceptions about the quality of Nike products. This study also found that 62% of survey participants mostly preferred Nike brands among other sportswear brands in the UK. Similarly, the study also shows that there are around 79% of customers have a likelihood to recommend Nike's products to others which is a high level of brand loyalty.

Moreover, this study has examined seven hypotheses which all are related to the relationships between PR strategies and CBBE. All seven hypotheses were accepted through a regression t-test. The correlation and regression between PR strategies and CBBE show that the PR strategies of Nike and customer-based brand equity are intercorrelated with each other and overall PR strategies have significant positive impacts on CBBE with $\beta = 0.817$ and $p = 0.000$. These findings are also consistent with many previous studies associated with PR strategies and customer-based brand equity in different contexts. According to Forsey (2018), effective PR strategies assist organisations to cultivate a positive reputation or public image through different earned media, including social media, in-person engagement and traditional media Forsey (2018). Different PR activities and strategic marketing communications combined with high-quality products have significantly supported Nike to gain higher brand equity. The slogan "Just Do It" and its logo allowed the company to increase its brand image among global audiences Goudreu (2017).

Similarly, Grunig et al. (2006) also found that organisations that practiced a two-way symmetric model of communication and pursued to align their interests with the public obtained the highest commercial rewards due to enhancing brand equity. Moreover, a study by Khan and Sukhotu (2019) indicated positive impacts of a company's media exposure and corporate social responsibility compliance on consumer's perceptions, which means companies that maintain a positive public image in media and positively contribute to society, following ethical business practices gain significant positive attitudes from the customers towards the brand, which is brand equity. Similarly, Tufail et al. (2014) also found that sponsorship and publicity have significant positive impacts on the brand equity of an organisation. If the sponsorship and publicity are favourable, then the company has significant positive brand equity.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSION

This study identified that Nike's PR strategies have significant positive impacts on CBBE. This means all the seven PR strategies considered in this study have significant positive impacts on CBBE.

The analysis of the mean and standard deviation of the rating scores for seven dimensions of PR strategy indicated that each element has a mean score of more than 3 with an overall mean score of 3.80 ± 0.61 (mean ± SD). It represents 76% of agreements by the customers who participated in this survey. This shows that PR strategies implemented by Nike are significantly effective based on customers' perceptions in the UK. All the seven strategies including corporate citizenship, crisis management, customer communication, media relations, influencer collaboration, event sponsorships, and social media are effectively managed by Nike to gain a better reputation in the sportswear and apparel industry in the UK.

The evaluation of the mean and SD for the scores of CBBE dimensions indicated that each element has a mean score of more than 3 with the overall mean score for CBBE is 3.95 ± 0.75 (mean ± SD). It represents 79% of agreements by the customers for the four dimensions of CBBE. This means Nike is significantly managing its brand equity in the minds of its customers in the UK.

The correlation and regression between PR strategies and CBBE indicated that the PR strategies of Nike and customer-based brand equity are intercorrelated with each other and overall PR strategies have significant positive impacts on CBBE with $\beta = 0.817$ and $p = 0.000$. This means Nike's PR strategies are highly effective to gain positive customer-based brand equity in the UK market.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study identified that there are around 10% of customers never purchase Nike products after the first purchase. This means there might have some issues with these customers. So, it is recommended to identify the cause of their frustration with Nike through specific customer surveys and make an appropriate plan and design specific strategies to address their concerns to become more effective in the market.

It is also found that around 10% (unlikely – 7.9% and extremely unlikely 2.0%) of customers do not like to recommend Nike's products to their friends and relatives. It is recommended to identify issues with them and develop appropriate plans and strategies to resolve any issues if applicable.

Out of seven PR strategies corporate citizenship is appeared to be less effective in the case of Nike. So, it is recommended to review its CSR strategies and sustainability practices. These practices should be aligned with emerging global environmental concerns, including global warming, climate change, health and safety of people, a fair wage for the workers, managing workplace conditions, etc.

It is also recommended to follow the recent approach to public relations, including analysing or knowing the audience through research, developing compelling and persuasive content, and effective use of emerging communication channels, such as social media, website, and online presence to engage more customers and develop a long-term relationship with the customers.

It is also suggested to focus on brand awareness, credibility, reputation and customer satisfaction by providing higher quality products and services. The

company should focus more on generating positive brand equity through offering a higher quality of products and successful management of controversy and crises.

It is also recommended to manage a consistent brand image by offering consistent quality products and services.

It is also required to listen to customers' voices through feedback on social media. Each concern and issue of the customer should be managed immediately so that it can help to generate positive perceptions towards the company.

5.3. LIMITATIONS

This research was conducted in a limited period by implementing a cross-sectional approach. This means this study has not considered the changes over time as the data was collected at a single point in time. This study has used a limited sample of 151 customers through the convenience sampling method, which is a non-probability method and has some limitations. This means this research has not ensured the equal selection of each member of the survey population. The respondents were selected based on their interests and availability. The limited sample may not provide an overall view of Nike customers.

Moreover, this study has used a quantitative approach to research, closed-ended questionnaires were used to evaluate PR strategies and CBBE of the Nike brand. An in-depth interview of customers might provide different results. The dimensions of PR strategies and dimensions of CBBE implemented in this study may not be sufficient as there might have other important strategies in the literature. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct large-scale research by exploring more dimensions of PR strategies and CBBE to test the impact of PR strategies on CBBE and to validate the current findings.

5.4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study has explored different nine dimensions of PR strategies (but implemented seven dimensions in the case of Nike), which could be implemented by PR practitioners to enhance their company's brand awareness and reputation, and to develop a brand image. This paper provides an overall outline of PR strategies and customer-based brand equity, which can be worth reading for general readers as well as PR and marketing professionals. This study has further added the strengths of PR strategies for managing brand equity.

Moreover, the research instruments developed in this study could be useful for PR and marketing practitioners in measuring their PR and brand management approaches. Further researchers can also use these dimensions of PR strategies in their studies. The research design and approach implemented in this study can also be replicable to other contexts and other industries as it has included major aspects of PR strategies and CBBE.

Similarly, these research findings can have practical implications for Nike's management while developing PR strategies for brand reputation management. These findings can also be applicable to other companies which are seeking to enhance their brand equity and reputations.

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