

2026 Superbowl Participation: NIKE, Inc.

Executive Summary

After a 27-year hiatus, Nike makes a powerful return to the Super Bowl with its '[So Win](#)' campaign, celebrating women's resilience and empowerment in sports. The ad became a significant success, generating [180,000](#) engagement actions on social media. Given Nike's recent challenges in reviving lagging sales and the overwhelmingly positive response to this year's campaign, the case for Nike's participation in 2026 remains strong. Based on the following POV and strategic analysis, clear data and methodology support this consideration. Overall, after 27 years, the excitement surrounding Nike's return remains high. Despite not producing a Super Bowl ad for nearly three decades, the campaign generates substantial buzz and elicits strong reactions from audiences.

Strategic Alignment

With increasing competition in the athletic shoe and apparel market, Nike faces challenges in maintaining its dominance. Nike's global market share for sneakers and apparel drops from [17.1% in 2022 to 16.4% in 2024](#). Competitors such as Adidas, Puma, Under Armour, and Reebok gain traction, particularly among younger consumers. However, with the Super Bowl achieving a record audience of [126 million viewers](#) for the second consecutive year, Nike has a prime opportunity to participate and capitalize on this vast audience reach. Nike strives to build an emotional and deeper connection with its audience by inspiring individuals to tackle challenges and bring out the athlete in everyone.

Nike's [mission](#) is to bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world while maintaining a strong stance on inclusivity and social impact. The brand positions itself as a leader in social impact marketing, advocating for diversity, equity, sustainability, and inclusion. With that in mind, Nike's ideal target audience falls within the [Gen Z market](#), often referred to as changemakers—individuals who seek more than just a brand but a movement. These consumers challenge the status quo, demand transparency, and base their buying decisions on values rather than aesthetics. Notably, individuals aged [18-34—predominantly Gen Z—account for 22.66 million Super Bowl viewers in 2024, reflecting an 8% increase from the previous year](#) and reinforcing the significance of investing in this platform.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Nike is a highly valued brand that dominates its market and maintains a strong global presence. Widely recognized and held in high regard, Nike's market capitalization stands at approximately [\\$105.52 billion](#), based on this year's figures alone. That being said, Nike's annual advertising and promotional expenses continue to increase substantially. In 2024, Nike's budget exceeds [\\$4 billion](#), demonstrating that the company has more than enough room for promotional spending and can easily afford the high costs for next year's Super Bowl.

The benefits far outweigh the risks, as Nike possesses the financial resources to cover the high expenses. The real value lies in capitalizing on the Super Bowl's massive viewership, which extends far beyond game day. Unlike other media platforms, Super Bowl commercials ignite widespread conversations, spark debates, and enhance brand recall. Many viewers find these commercials as

engaging, if not more so, than the game [itself](#). Regarding viewership, polls indicate that about [59%](#) of Gen Z and millennials anticipate watching the game, and about [75%](#) express their intent to tune in. By participating in next year's Super Bowl, Nike gains the opportunity to reach a vast audience while directly engaging its target demographic—all on a single, high-impact platform rather than dispersing efforts across multiple social media channels.

Beyond their strong Super Bowl viewership, Gen Z consumers also prioritize sustainability and ethical manufacturing practices. This consumer segment actively seeks brands that align with their personal values. About [66%](#) of Gen Z consumers consider sustainability a key factor in their purchasing decisions, while [62%](#) prefer buying from sustainable brands and [73%](#) are willing to pay more for sustainable products.

Creative Opportunities

Nike drives change and fosters inclusion and diversity within the world of athletics. Through storytelling and celebrity endorsements, this promotional strategy has proven successful. Celebrity endorsements played a significant role in this year's Super Bowl, and Nike embraced this approach in its "So Win" campaign, featuring prominent female athletes such as Caitlin Clark and Jordan Chiles.

Continuing to leverage [celebrity endorsements](#), particularly with figures who resonate with Gen Z, offers an effective strategy for capturing the attention and building loyalty within this key audience. This approach also helps counteract common criticisms surrounding Nike's labor practices. Specifically, it shapes perception and builds trust. By collaborating with celebrities and athletes known for advocacy and sustainability, consumers may begin to perceive Nike as a more conscious and ethical brand.

Recommendation

Based on the analysis, Nike should actively pursue participation in the 2026 Super Bowl. As one of the most-watched events of the year, the Super Bowl offers a unique opportunity for massive brand exposure. This past Super Bowl marked the second consecutive year of record-breaking viewership, reaching 126 million viewers, including 22.66 million from Gen Z, Nike's core target audience. By participating in next year's Super Bowl, Nike reinforces its market dominance and stays ahead of rising competitors like Puma and Adidas.

From a financial standpoint, the benefits far outweigh the risks, as Nike possesses the capital to comfortably cover the high costs. The true value lies in leveraging the Super Bowl's unparalleled reach, which extends far beyond game day. Unlike other media platforms, Super Bowl commercials create lasting impact—sparking conversations, driving debate, and strengthening brand recall. In fact, many viewers find the commercials just as engaging, if not more so, than the game itself.

Additionally, celebrity endorsements continue to prove highly effective, as seen in Nike's Super Bowl ad and numerous other high-performing campaigns. Nike's commitment to sustainability, equity, and diversity aligns deeply with Gen Z's values, making it crucial to reinforce these principles in its messaging. Given the backlash Nike faces regarding its manufacturing practices, the Super Bowl provides a strategic opportunity to reshape public perception and strengthen consumer trust. One strategic step forward involves incorporating celebrities or athletes nationally recognized for their commitment to sustainability and ethical manufacturing to help improve Nike's reputation.

