Brand Analysis: Cleveland Browns

COM 532 – Spring Semester 1 – 2023 Group 3

Overview

The Cleveland Browns, also known as The Browns is a national football team based in Cleveland that was founded in 1945 by Arthur B. McBride and Robert H. Gries. The Cleveland Browns got its name from co-founder Paul E. Brown who reigned as the first head coach of the team from 1946-1962 (Elrod, 2021). The Cleveland Browns compete in the North Division of the American Football Conference of the National Football League. The Cleveland Browns franchise value in 2022 came to 3.85 billion and is now owned by Dee and Jimmy Haslam (Gough, 2023).

FirstEnergy Stadium is the home field of the Cleveland Browns. This stadium is where fans gather enthusiastically to watch a Cleveland Browns home game. Fans have named a specific section of the stadium, "The Dawg Pound" which is located in the bleacher section behind the east end zone. This section is named "The Dawg Pound" because it is where Brown players run up to be celebrated with fans after intercepting a ball for a touchdown.

The Cleveland Browns are not known for having a winning record. Having played in a total of 70 seasons since 1946, The Browns have won four NFL championships in 1950, 1954-1955, and 1964 and have won four All-American Football Conference championships in 1946-1949 (Augustyn, 2008). The Browns have never made an appearance in the Super Bowl.

The Browns are known for having one of the most loyal fanbases in the league. Cleveland Brown fans were nominated for FanSided's Fandom 250 which is a network that ranks the top 250 fanbases in the world (FoxSports, 2017). There have been a number of nicknames for the Cleveland Browns that fans have come up with over the years. Fans have established nicknames for The Browns as a team as well as for individual players and the home stadium. From The Kardiac Kids established in the 1980s to The Factory of Sadness, which refers to FirstEnergy Stadium to The Dawg Pound as previously mentioned, Cleveland Brown Fans have a name for everything and each name holds a unique story behind it.

Offerings

The Cleveland Browns offer fans entertainment and a sense of belonging to the Cleveland Browns fanbase. In addition to the community of fans, the Cleveland Browns give back to the community and city of Cleveland through partnerships with local veterans and with University Hospital.

The Cleveland Browns, like any football team, primarily offer entertainment. Attending a Cleveland Browns game is not just watching a game, but an experience. The team strives to

provide a good in-person experience for fans. The experience of going to a Cleveland Browns game watching them play live, cheering with the fans, and the environment of a professional stadium offers a great deal of entertainment. This entertainment that is offered can also be experienced at a local sports bar or in the comfort of one's home. The gameplay and players of the Cleveland Browns offer entertainment in different formats.

The Cleveland Browns have excelled at creating a large community of fans. The biggest offering the team thrives on is the community that is created with a mutual love of the team, and players, and the hope that the team does progress further in the standings each year. This is known by Henri Tajfel's phenomenon called Social Identity Theory in which "Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s)" (McLeod, 1970). Cleveland Browns fans take pride in the identity of being Cleveland Browns fans, regardless of how the team performs on the field, because win or lose, they get to be part of the community that is Cleveland Browns. Another appeal of belonging is the Cleveland Browns' culture that comes with being a fan, which only other fans can relate to. Such as the running joke of staying loyal to a poor-performing team. Part of this feeling of community is through interactions on social media, the Cleveland Browns' social media features the players, talking to fans, and conducting business, in the locker room, so that fans feel as though they know the players and are a part of the team. The Cleveland Browns also offer fans other ways to make them feel like they are part of the team, such as contests for winning a team-signed jersey or a trip to the playoffs. The Cleveland Browns took into consideration fan opinions when deciding whether or not to change the team logo (Poisal, 2022). The Cleveland Browns brand has created a loyal fan base that allows fans to feel close to the team and community whether they are in Cleveland or across the country.

The Cleveland Browns give back to the city of Cleveland. The team supports several charities in the city that provide better education and youth football programs. The players associated with the Cleveland Browns also participate in charitable events, the Cleveland Browns' social media features team players playing with patients at the children's hospital. In addition to the charitable work, The Cleveland Browns help stimulate the economy by bringing in tourism to Clevend driven through game attendance from dedicated fans that are not always located locally.

Through virtual and in-person means, the Cleveland Browns have much to offer to the football community, the loyal fan base, and the city of Cleveland.

Competitive Landscape

The main competitors of the Cleveland Browns are other teams in the AFC, especially the other teams in the AFC North Division and the team's rival, the Pittsburgh Steelers. In addition to the NFL, competition for attention also includes the other major league sports teams that are housed

in the city of Cleveland. This includes the NBA team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, and the MLB team the Cleveland Guardians, formerly known as the Cleveland Indians.

Not only are NFL teams competing for points on the scoreboard, these teams are also competing for fans. Fans spend lots of money on tickets to see their favorite teams play, sports memorabilia with their favorite player's name, and hours in front of the television. Every team is competing for loyal fans who are willing to invest capital into their team. The Cleveland Browns face more direct competition with other teams in their AFC North division including the Cincinnati Bengals, Baltimore Ravens, and the Pittsburgh Steelers. Not only are these teams competing for the top place in their region, but since these teams are in closer proximity to one another, the teams also compete for fans. One of the biggest team competitors for the Cleveland Browns is the Pittsburgh Steelers. These teams are rivals in athletics but also due to the very close location of Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Fan bases live in nearby areas and they can actively participate in either fan community.

The Cleveland Browns are also in competition with its fellow professional sports teams, like the NBA team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, and the MLB team, the Cleveland Guardians. Although each team plays a different sport, all the teams are part of the community and city of Cleveland. These teams compete for physical space in the city, such as arenas and parking, and how to make going to a game easily accessible. The teams are also competing for community support, whether it be deciding which team to purchase season tickets for or what team to go see play over the weekend. Since many of these sports seasons overlap, the teams also compete for airtime on networks. The Cleveland Browns may face challenges with their competition even more so because the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Cleveland Guardians are better at their respective sports.

Key Audience

Cleveland Brown's primary audience includes football fans, former players and coaches, and the fans of the Cleveland Browns, the Clevelanders. Specifically, this includes the ages between 35 and 45 and predominantly male. Many Clevelanders consider being a Browns fan a part of their collective identity.

Former players and members of the staff of NFL teams are famously known for remaining lifelong fans of their teams. It is notable that past players still show up to games and can be seen on the jumbotron at games or on the sidelines. Former players after retirement have also been known for staying in the same city. For example, Fike who played for the Cleveland Browns for eight seasons still lives in the area today with his family. Additionally, the Browns host many former players and staff members for games and honor them during games. This is notable when

former players are inducted into the Legends Program. This program is designed for those who have left great impacts not only on the sport but on the franchise as a whole.

The primary audience remains the Clevelanders also known as Dawg Pound. Cleveland fans have been through a myriad of ups and downs. Fans continue to show up proudly to games wearing their brown and orange apparel despite the numerous occasions that fans have seen the Cleveland Browns hit a wall in the season. Clevelanders are not fair-weather fans and continue to show up for the team. To the very end, these will and continue to be their primary audience. The audience of the Cleveland Browns expands beyond Cleveland, Ohio. The fanbase is one of the largest NFL fan bases in the country.

The Cleveland Browns have tried expanding their audience to their younger crowds through partnerships in their local area. The Cleveland Browns have partnered with minority entrepreneurs in the Cleveland area to showcase their support. This is accomplished through the JumpStart events that are hosted to provide a lift to their community. The events include Small Business Impact Program Showcase, Small Business Training Camp, the "First and Tech" happy hour event for tech startups, and Small Business Impact Program Showcase: Round 2. This partnership with JumpStart and the Browns to support local businesses provides a foundation for even greater support for the Browns. This program went beyond sports, and that is what connects the community to the Browns. It provided the community with programming and services to help their businesses succeed which helps the overall Cleveland community thrive. Individuals that have taken part in the experience have stated that they feel as fans that the Browns invested in them and that they can invest their time as a fan of the Browns.

Finally, there is an attraction of all NFL football fans to tune into Sunday Night football games including the Cleveland Browns. The NFL has a wide audience, some of which watch football just to watch the game despite who is playing. Thus, the Cleveland Browns gain a wider audience outside of their traditional fanbase due to their exposure on a larger scale being a part of the NFL.

Positioning

The Cleveland Browns position itself as the professional team of the Cleveland area that connects the Clevelanders into a unified group across the country. The Browns are unique not only because they are the only NFL team that does not have a logo on its helmet but because of their unique history and the communal connection it brings to their fans.

The Browns are not in a position to be a nationally acclaimed sports team and actually provided Cleveland with a reputation for losing national teams. However, this is positively capitalized on with their efforts in getting involved in their community and being seen as a team that does not

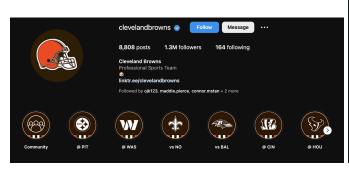
just play the sport of football in their community, but the Browns are a part of the community. Some would go as far as to say that the Browns bring a sense of community and identity to the Clevelanders. The brand of Cleveland Browns is centralized around fan loyalty.

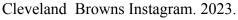
A gargantuan part of the Cleveland brand is the loyalty of the fan base. This loyalty is the brickwork that embodies the down-to-earth brand that the Browns have established. The fans are not fans due to the multiple championships that have been won, but because of the essence of the franchise as being a down-to-earth community team. This is notable through the activity within the community with their partnerships and services to the community.

Overall, the brand mantra for the Cleveland Browns is a down-to-earth community football program. This is captivated by the community nationally that follows the team year after year even when the team is falling short of national titles. Fans follow the Cleveland Browns due to their loyalty that is replenished through the community investments, messaging, and entertainment that is brought to them by the team.

Messaging

It is evident through all social media platforms that the Browns are team-oriented and their platforms create a sense of community or family between the fans and teammates. Many posts focus on celebrating and recognizing members of the Browns team for their achievements on and off the field. Players are often recognized for birthdays, amazing plays, and achievements such as Hall of Fame and Pro Bowl invitations. The Browns' Instagram highlights showcase play highlights from each regular season game.







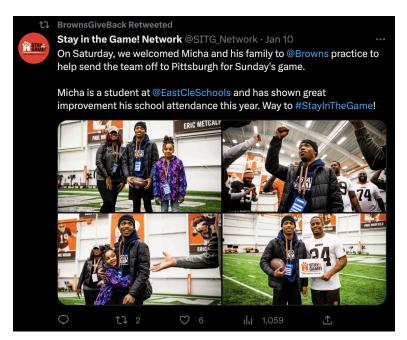
Cleveland Browns Facebook. 2023.

The Cleveland Browns value philanthropy and giving back to their community. Their community initiatives are evident on all media platforms and social impact has become an integral part of the teams' branding. The Browns give back to their community in so many different forms, especially helping children in need. They spotlight their partnership with University Hospital, the #StayInTheGame local initiative to keep kids in school, and the #SaluteToService initiative that

benefits the armed forces and veterans. The Browns have an official Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter page which solely appreciates their philanthropic endeavors @BrownsGiveBack.



Cleveland Browns Instagram. 2023. The Browns are celebrating the extension of their partnership with University Hospital.

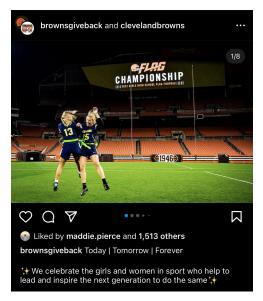


BrownsGiveBack. 2023 Stay in the Game! event celebrating a local student.

Inclusivity and diversity are integral parts of the Browns' message. The team has many inclusivity initiatives that start on the field and carry on far beyond that. The Browns are in a partnership with JumpStartInc which supports and showcases minority-owned small businesses. The Browns also have a youth football league that allows the inclusion of a women's flag football team. Cleveland Browns football brings everyone together despite their differences.



Cleveland Browns Twitter. 2023.



Cleveland Browns Instagram. 2023.

It is evident the Browns' messaging changes depending on the time of year. During the regular football season, the Browns are pushing more content associated with games such as play highlights and player content. In the postseason and off-season, the Browns' social media becomes more philanthropy-oriented and player announcement-heavy. The @BrownGivesBack

social media platforms allow fans to keep up with the social impacts the Browns team makes year-round when the regular social media pages are filled with game content.



Cleveland Browns Facebook. 2023.



Cleveland Browns Twitter. 2022.

Communication

The content on the Cleveland Browns Instagram page, Facebook page, and Twitter are cross-promotional. Posts that are published on these three platforms remain consistent, often the same messages are published in similar forms on each platform. This is beneficial, keeping fans engaged and informed of everything important happening with their team. Fans also stay in the loop through the official Cleveland Browns website. The team's social media pages are very community and fanbase-oriented. Fans are comfortable sharing opinions and commenting feedback on the posts. Facebook fan groups are also an important mode of communication for Browns fans where they can openly share their thoughts through posts and discussions.

The Browns' Facebook page and Instagram account each have about 1.3 million followers. The followers are pretty consistent because Facebook and Instagram are related social media platforms. Content on these two platforms is consistent with each other and posts are made regularly, often more than once per day. Interactions on these platforms are higher during the regular pro football season and slightly taper off after the season is over. Posts concerning players, team announcements, and game highlights tend to get more engagement than posts concerned with philanthropic endeavors.

Twitter is the Browns' most followed account, with 1.5 million followers. Again, content and frequency is consistent with that of Facebook and Instagram. The Brown's tweets seem to always receive at least 100,000 views each, but the interactions (likes, comments, retweets) are much lower. Even though it is the most followed platform, the teams' Facebook and Instagram accounts tend to get many more likes and comments.

Like other NFL teams, the Browns are also on TikTok @Browns. The team has roughly 970,000 followers and 11.8 million likes. The content posted on the teams' TikTok differs from the other social media platforms. This is to attract a younger and different audience that uses TikTok primarily. These videos on TikTok are more light-hearted, comedic, and personal than content on the other platforms. The Browns post TikTok videos a couple of times every week.

The Browns' YouTube page has 250,000 subscribers and new videos are posted a couple of times every week. The content that is posted on the YouTube channel is consistent with Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook but has lengthier videos than the other platforms. Content on YouTube includes content like full-length press conferences and interviews, and a series called 'Building the Browns.' YouTube is helpful for fans who want in-depth information on their team.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

The Cleveland Browns involving fans in important decision-making processes is a way in which brand loyalty has been built upon. Browns fans being able to vote on a poll in order to decide on the new midfield logo, for example, is how this very important component of IMC has been incorporated. Creating a positive experience for fans can be seen as benefiting the IMC process.

Community involvement and creating a brand identity not limited to football is an efficient way to build brand loyalty. The Cleveland community values connection and The Browns being involved in the community creates lasting impressions that allow fans to repeatedly show up for something bigger than themselves.

Weaknesses

Having one of the worst losing records compared to other teams in the NFL is a weakness, one that places the team in the line of fire across social media platforms when it comes to discussions about game outcomes and fans expressing their disappointment.

Sexual assault claims against the Cleveland Browns quarterback, Deshaun Watson paints a bad picture for the team and the brand. Acquiring Deshaun Watson after being aware of the known allegations placed fans in a difficult situation, one that has fans questioning whether to continue to support the team or not.

Opportunities

With streaming platforms being extremely popular, especially since the height of the pandemic, continued exposure on ESPN networks as well as other streaming platforms such as; HULU, live TV, and YouTube TV. Streaming channels such as these experienced a boost in their audience due to more people choosing to stay at home because of the pandemic.

Continuing to participate in local partnerships is another opportunity for exposure in their community. The Cleveland Browns also are presented with the opportunity to gain a wider audience by continuing the youth football camp series as well as the Legends Clinic program that is put on for boys and girls.

Releasing Deshaun Watson as the quarterback and starting clean with a quarterback who doesn't have a history of controversy or a troubled past is an opportunity. The Cleveland Browns have never had a franchise quarterback in their history. A great quarterback attracts great offensive talent. If this opportunity were to be taken advantage of, this would give fans even more reason to be loyal to the team and the brand.

Threats

Although the Cleveland Browns do have a loyal fanbase, the possible idea of fans migrating towards becoming fans of the Cincinnati Bengals or the Pittsburgh Steelers is a possible threat to the team. Both teams are known rivals to the Cleveland Browns. With the constant losses and clear disappointment of fans in the comments across social media platforms, fans supporting a team that is also close in proximity and that may be more likely to win could cause the Cleveland Browns fan base numbers to fall.

Recommendations

In order to reach new audiences, the Cleveland Browns should consider capitalizing on their philanthropic work. The Cleveland Browns can launch an ad campaign that showcases their brand of community engagement with their local entrepreneurs. This ad campaign can be focused on their social media platforms to promote higher user engagement. The ad campaign can be focused on their partnership with a local business initiative with JumpStart and can be a partnership social media campaign to capitalize on both of their audience. This can not only increase their exposure to younger generations on popular social media sites like TikTok but also captivate other football fans and business owners who relate to the message. The Cleveland Browns support and invest in their fans.

The Cleveland Browns community is one of the biggest offerings the team has. This would not be possible without the support of fans. The Cleveland Browns feature some fan photos on their sites, but increasing overall fan interactions and photos of fans increases the feeling of community. Especially when a fan can see their own picture on the Cleveland Brown website or social media. The Cleveland Browns could also benefit from showing appreciation to those behind the scenes of the team, such as those on the business side, athletic side, and those who provide fans with a great experience at the games. There are so many moving parts to an NFL team yet, only the players are featured. Making staff and other workers of the team feel appreciated allows them to give their fans a better experience. Another underrepresented population on the Cleveland Brown's website and social media is women. The Cleveland Browns have had a female coach yet their website is all pictures of men. With the large population of Cleveland Browns fans, women severely lack representation in marketing posts

and community programs. Including more women representation in the marketing for the Cleveland Browns can increase the fanbase. While the NFL in general is not super progressive towards the female population, the Cleveland Browns can be one of the first and represent the female fans and those behind the scenes that help the team succeed.

Children of the Northeast Ohio area are part of an underserved community and the Browns prioritize helping these children through their social impact initiatives. From the Cleveland Boys & Girls Club, youth camps, Stay in the Game!, and just helping out at local schools, you can find a Browns player volunteering. These different initiatives are all very beneficial to the local children. The Browns should combine these different initiatives and create one large social impact campaign for the children of Northeast Ohio, in order to make sure that no child is left behind and all of the children are receiving the benefits that the Browns have to offer. This would create more awareness of the social impact the Browns team has on their community and also offer more opportunities for donations, partnerships, and distribution of help to the different initiatives. One large campaign could make it easier for fans to participate in the goodwill as well. Fans could have opportunities to donate to the campaign at the football games and also through the Browns' social media platforms.

Resources

- Augustyn, A. (2008, November 14). *Cleveland Browns American Football Team*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cleveland-Browns
- Cleveland Browns. (n.d.). *Home* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved February 4, 2023, from https://www.facebook.com/clevelandbrowns
- Cleveland Browns [@clevelandbrowns]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram Profile]. Instagram. Retrieved February 4, 2023, from https://www.instagram.com/clevelandbrowns/?hl=en
- Cleveland Browns. [@Browns]. (n.d.). [TikTok profile]. TikTok. Retrieved February 4, 2023, from https://www.tiktok.com/@browns?lang=en
- Cleveland Browns [@Browns]. (n.d.). *Tweets & replies* [Twitter profile]. Twitter. Retrieved February 4, 2023, from https://twitter.com/Browns
- Browns Give Back [@BrownGivesBack]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram Profile]. Instagram. Retrieved February 4, 2023, from https://www.instagram.com/brownsgiveback/?hl=en
- Donatelli, J. (2022, July 26). What being a browns fan really means. News 5 Cleveland WEWS. https://www.news5cleveland.com/sports/browns/what-being-a-browns-fan-really-means. Accessed 3 Feb. 2023.
- Elrod, J. (2021, June 19). *Cleveland Browns: Encyclopedia of cleveland history: Case western reserve university*. Encyclopedia of Cleveland History | Case Western Reserve University. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from https://case.edu/ech/articles/c/cleveland-browns
- FoxSports. (2017, June 30). *Cleveland Browns: One of the best fan bases in the world*. FOX Sports. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from https://www.foxsports.com/stories/nfl/cleveland-browns-one-of-the-best-fan-bases-in-the-world
- Gough, C. (2023, January 2). *Cleveland Browns franchise value 2022*. Statista. Retrieved February 3, 2023, from <a href="https://www.statista.com/statistics/194456/franchise-value-of-the-cleveland-browns-since-2006/#:~:text=Franchise%20value%20of%20the%20Cleveland%20Browns%20(NFL)%202002%2D2022&text=In%202022%2C%20the%20franchise%20value%20came%20to%203.85%20billion%20U.S.%20dollars.
- Mcleod, S. (1970, January 1). Social Identity Theory. social identity theory . Retrieved February 4, 2023, from https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html

- Poisal, Anthony. "A Lift That Will Last." *Www.clevelandbrowns.com*, 2023, www.clevelandbrowns.com/news/a-lift-that-will-last. Accessed 3 Feb. 2023.
- Poisal, A. (2022). *Joe thomas, darrel "pete" brewster named to class of 2022 browns legends*. Www.clevelandbrowns.com.

 $\frac{https://www.clevelandbrowns.com/news/joe-thomas-darrel-pete-brewster-named-to-class}{-of-2022-browns-legends}.\ Accessed\ 3\ Feb.\ 2023.$