

Name: Zhenyi Zhou
Class: PR 568
Date: 10/3/23
Midterm

Nike Japan - You Can't Stop The Future - A Cross-Cultural Messaging Crisis

1. Crisis Scenario Summary

In the three-minute campaign launched by Nike Japan, the lives of three girls from marginalized communities were depicted, uncovering the discrimination and micro-aggression they face in their daily lives as minorities in Japan. The campaign was a real inspirational piece without the context that it received massive backlash on the internet after being released. The three female soccer players are from diverse backgrounds and heritages, including mixed-raced African Japanese, ethnically Korean, and the victim of school bullying.

The negative discourse mainly accused Nike of being “anti-Japan” in the ad and exaggerating the sentiment of racism in the country. More than 40% of the people disliked the video on YouTube which spiked 11 million views in a week. The Japanese Government has been slow to address discrimination issues in Japan, and the national census also doesn't collect data on race and ethnicity. Several human rights issues and discrimination have been lingering in Japanese society for decades and need to be addressed, including women's rights, LGBTQ rights, and the discrimination against Zainichi Koreans in Japan.

Japanese netizens were angry about “showing the rest of the world the worst part of Japan” and “using political correctness from a Western perspective in the Japanese market”. The controversies and cancel cultures are often brought up by the lack of understanding of Asian consumer behaviors. Taking the moral high ground and showing an explicit political standpoint can be devastating for the brand image in some East Asian countries. In response to the controversy, Nike Japan took down the video from all platforms and updated an unofficial statement in an inconspicuous place on the website saying “We have long listened to minority voices, supported and spoken for causes that fit our values. We believe sports have the power to show what a better world looks like, to bring people together and encourage action in their respective communities.” They didn’t have a spokesperson since it was a minor crisis and didn’t make any further comment.

Nike Japan was trying to handle the crisis without causing further controversies and worsening the discourse. The management seems effective since after three years people have already forgotten about it. What could have been done better was to have an official statement on social media to apologize for the misdelivery of the message, since this may be the attitude most Japanese netizens in the controversy wanted to see. However, doing this may bring more risks of bringing another round of discourse. When dealing with cross-cultural messaging crises, Scott suggested the guideline of “the less is better”, and maybe it also applies to this case.

2. FUD

FUD is not involved in the scenario.

3. PR Objective

The PR objectives are divided into three parts:

1. Controlling the current discourse and not raising any other unnecessary controversies.

Making sure the current discourse about the campaign doesn't get any worse, closing all comment sections on related content, and taking down the videos from various platforms. Avoid posting any other posts or content surrounding the campaign, pivoting the public attention towards other content and products, including timely events like competitions or stories of specific athletes.

2. Making the clear position that Nike wants to listen to and support minority voices as a global brand.

Acknowledging discrimination and bullying are global issues and showing the social responsibility as a global brand to address these issues. Focusing on the empowering strength of sports on an individual level, and how sport spirit is a connecting channel to eliminate discrimination and prejudice. Restating the brand mission and Nike's attitude against any form of discrimination and racism.

3. Showing a humble attitude towards stakeholders and consumers, making sure people are not boycotting the brand.

Acknowledging that the messaging in the campaign could be too explicit and harsh while not following the Japanese way of communication. Stating the fact that Nike doesn't intend to take

the moral high ground to accuse the Japanese of being indulgent towards discrimination and racism.

4. PR Strategy

1. Conducting social listening on current discourse after the backlash outburst, classifying the comments and posts into different categories. Making sure the company is not overreacting to the problem.
2. Taking action as soon as the crisis happened, including closing the comment section and taking down the video from social media platforms. However, these actions should be taken inconspicuously, and avoid further controversies on these specific actions. In similar situations, controversies may arise targeting the company as “not capable of accepting criticism”.
3. Evaluating the crisis with other departments, including financial damage and brand image damage. Making assessments to decide whether to take further actions to communicate with stakeholders or sponsors.
4. Working on the message or media statement. By collaborating with the media team, Nike should be prepared to release a media statement or a message on social media to address the controversy.
5. Potentially cooperate with influencers to endorse the brand. After the crisis takes place, Nike could potentially seek influencers with similar backgrounds as the three athletes in the campaign to share their own stories to continue the conversation in the campaign as well as endorse the brand image.

5. Goal

The goal of managing this cross-cultural messaging crisis is to build a positive brand image of taking social responsibilities globally as a global brand. The goal of media interviews and press conferences is to avoid taking a clear standpoint on the racism problem in Japan and create a narrative of willingness to support all minority groups around the world through the empowerment of sports from a brand.

Reviewing all the media articles covering this issue including Bloomberg, BBC, CNN, and the Washington Post, the attitude towards Nike Japan's campaign is overall positive, without criticizing the campaign message as inappropriate. Most articles dive into the phenomenon behind why Nike Japan faced backlash, and the societal issue of racism in Japan, rather than picking the problem of the campaign strategy. The overall goal was achieved after Nike's action and response.

6. Theme

The key messages of the statement are:

1. Showing willingness to listen and support minority voices as a global brand
2. Believe that sports have the power to build community and overcome prejudices
3. Acknowledging that discrimination is a global issue, Nike is willing to take responsibility and open up the conversation.

The key messages should be implemented into the action and responses in a convincing way, and with an affirming tone by showing empathy and support.

7. Media Statement

As our campaign brings up a lot of conversations surrounding discrimination, we want to acknowledge that discrimination is a global issue, and the testimonials of these real athletes inspired us to take action and speak more openly about these issues. We believe that sports of any kind have the power to build community, bring people together, and overcome prejudices. We want to build a better world through sports together with our stakeholders and consumers.

In addition, Nike as a global brand has long listened to minority voices and been as supportive as we can. In our mission and values, we want to bring inspiration and innovation as well as unite people in the joy of movement. We have invited a third-party cultural education group to educate our staff and management team, please visit our [website](#) for further information and resources. We want to keep being mindful and culturally sensitive when delivering messages and communicating to our audience. Thank you for contributing to the conversation and showing support to the athletes.

8. Q&A

Q: Is the campaign trying to criticize the Japanese for being racist?

A: The campaign depicted the daily life of three young female athletes based on true stories, the main message of the ad is to encourage young athletes to embrace themselves on an individual level, and intended to inspire people to empower themselves through sports.

Q: Has Nike done any research before creating the ad?

A: Using the stories of the three young girls wasn't an abrupt decision, and we were really inspired and moved by these stories. Choosing to tell their stories to the world aligns with Nike's mission of bringing inspiration and uniting people in the joy of movement.

Q: Does Nike publicly support the Zainichi community in Japan, has Nike provided any financial support to the community?

A: Discrimination and prejudices over minority ethnic groups are a global issue, and Nike is willing to listen to and support minority voices as a global brand.

Q: Nike has long been criticized for maintaining conservative political ties, discriminatory relationships with women athletes and employees, and questionable labor practices, while selling ideas on social justice issues in campaigns, what is your response?

A: Nike is deeply committed to diversity, equity, and inclusive guidelines and practices. Nike is against any form of discrimination and racism. We want to address social justice issues internally as well as in our campaigns, and we want to ensure each person is included and celebrated for who they are.

Q: Why does Nike Japan take down the video on YouTube instead of responding to the comments?

A: The Nike Japan YouTube Channel is operated with constant content refresh, we want to encourage an open and healthy conversation surrounding the issue and want to show appreciation for those who supported the athletes.

Q: Did Nike provide financial compensation for the three athletes where the story of the campaign came from?

A: Nike has provided reasonable compensation for everyone included in our branded messages, and we appreciate athletes from around the world for providing us with inspiration and motivation.

Q: What is Nike's action for addressing discrimination and racism issues in Japan

A: Nike as a global brand believes in the power of sports that can bring people together to build community and overcome prejudices. Nike has taken social responsibility to address different issues, and more information can be found on Nike's website under Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Q: Will Nike release future campaigns addressing similar human rights issues?

A: Nike has been working with extraordinary creative agencies to deliver messages that can inspire people and build communities. Nike is willing to take the social responsibility of opening the conversations around the world, although acknowledging that it may be hard.

Q: Will Nike Japan shift its media strategy when launching campaigns in Japan in the future?

A: We have started to collaborate with a third-party agency to educate our media team about cultural sensitivity, and communication methods that the Japanese audiences prefer. We apologize that our message was perceived in an unintended way, but we are making an effort to be more mindful in delivering messages, and we are sharing these resources with the public. More info can be found on Nike Japan's website.

Q: Are any of the Nike Japan athletes facing similar situations as in the campaign, how did Nike Japan address the situations?

A: Nike strictly follows the guidelines of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity. We are here today to talk about the controversy surrounding the campaign, as Nike is trying its best to provide any needed support and resources to our athletes, and we shared the value of fighting against any form of discrimination internally.