



Starbucks “Race Together”

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PR565: Corporate Public Relations and Reputation

August 31, 2020

Race Together

- On March 15, 2015 Starbucks launched “Race Together” initiative in response to racial tragedies in Ferguson, MO. and NYC.
- However, the well-intentioned initiative soon got backlashes as most people do not want to discuss such a sensitive and complex topic when they are just going in for a cup of coffee.



Public Response



April

@ReignOfApril



Not sure what [@Starbucks](#) was thinking. I don't have time to explain 400 years of oppression to you & still make my train. [#RaceTogether](#)

6:59 AM - 17 Mar 2015

↩️ ↻ 647 ❤️ 667



Venus Envy

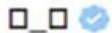
@levijkm



Would [#Starbucks](#) lower their prices in order to offset the emotional cost of discussing [#RaceTogether](#) with a clueless Barista?

8:14 AM - 17 Mar 2015

↩️ ↻ 4 ❤️ 8



@Mikelsaac



yesterday: talk about Love at McDonalds
today: talk about race at starbucks
tmrw: psychoanalysis from guy who makes blizzards at dairy queen

10:45 PM - 16 Mar 2015

↩️ ↻ 40 ❤️ 62



Jamil Smith

@JamilSmith



The only folks happy about Starbucks baristas discussing race with customers are the suits who run it. Feel-good liberalism at its worst.

11:14 PM - 16 Mar 2015

370 RETWEETS 354 FAVORITES



Starbucks' Reaction

- Maintained writing “Race Together” on cups till the intended end date
- CEO Howard Schultz stated in an interview that the company has a larger plan in place to address the racial issue.

Starbucks' Commitment



“The Larger Plan”

- To hire 10,000 opportunity youths by 2018
- To open stores in 15 diverse urban communities across the country including a store in Ferguson, Missouri
- To expand Starbucks College Achievement Plan to offer full tuition coverage for qualifying partners

Problems of “Race Together” Initiative

- Failed to anticipate public backlash
 - Values-based company
 - Company does not make changes based on public response
- Timing
 - Failed to measure likelihood of scenarios in which customers and baristas could engage in thoughtful discourse on race relations



Source: Seattle Times

Business and Communication Objectives

- **Business Objectives**
 - To respond to the racial unrest
 - To claim thought leadership
 - Corporate social activism
- **Communication Objectives**
 - To respond to the racial unrest
 - To bring public awareness to racial issues through Race Together
 - To influence social change

Strategic Alternatives

Key Stakeholders

- Employees
 - Specifically Black/African American employees
- Investors
 - CEO Speech

Media Alternatives

- Different Campaign Photo
- More structured approach to the campaign
- Twitter Presence
- Launch campaign with announcements of partnering with different media outlets

Key Messages

- Strong social justice stance
- Large companies can take a stance and still profit
- No tolerance for racism

Evaluation of Starbucks' Approaches & Our Potential Solutions

Starbucks' Approaches

- Commitment to corporate values
 - Schultz redefined corporate social responsibility
 - Company expanded Race Together initiative, despite backlash
- Media interviews and statements from CEO
 - Schultz' CNBC interview in 2015 played to investors
 - Schultz claimed larger plan in place to address racial tension, transparency from company
- Programs and partnerships
 - *USA Today* partnership
 - Nationwide community forums
 - 10,000 Opportunity Youth

Suggested Solutions

- Social media
 - Starbucks has a strong Instagram and Twitter following so implementing more strategic posts for Race Together initiative
- Renewing partnerships
 - Expanding content with different news organizations
 - Partnering with nonprofits nationwide to launch larger community forums
- Creating conference event series led by C-suite
 - Boost CSR initiatives and enact change
 - Similar to Edelman Trust Barometer, PWC FutureBrand Index, etc.

Thank You!