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Beyond all Boundaries: Women Empowerment and the Russian Sportswear Market

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ABSTRACT:

In 2017, Nike Russia created one of the most successful and influential ad campaigns in the Russian women's sportswear market by encouraging young girls to try new sports. At the same time, Reebok launched a successful worldwide "be more human" campaign aimed at empowering women all around the globe. Two years after, Reebok Russia tried to localize the successful campaign while adjusting the message to be more assertive. As a result, the company met a country-wide outrage from both feminists and anti-feminists. The case centers around Nikolay Borisov, the CEO of Nike Russia, who was unexpectedly drawn into a provocative public discussion on the use of the female empowerment agenda for cause-related marketing. The case dilemma is set during mid-February 2019 and involves Borisov's assessment of the impact of the competitor's viral campaign on the market and choice of a reaction strategy to public outrage.

CUST_LEARNING_OBJECTIVES :No data available.

To form the story behind the case, Nike Russia representatives were approached for background information, such as the acting Ecosystem Program Manager and the PR department. The case was based on primary data gathered during a series of 3 video interviews (each - about 40 minutes) with the acting CEO of Nike Russia during the period described in the case. The interviews took place in May 2021. Industry reports, organizational documents, social media posts, and news articles were used as secondary data. To maintain confidentiality, some data has been hidden (e.g., Table 2 and Table 3), and names have been changed by the authors. The description of timeframes and related events may have been modified to fit the storyline.

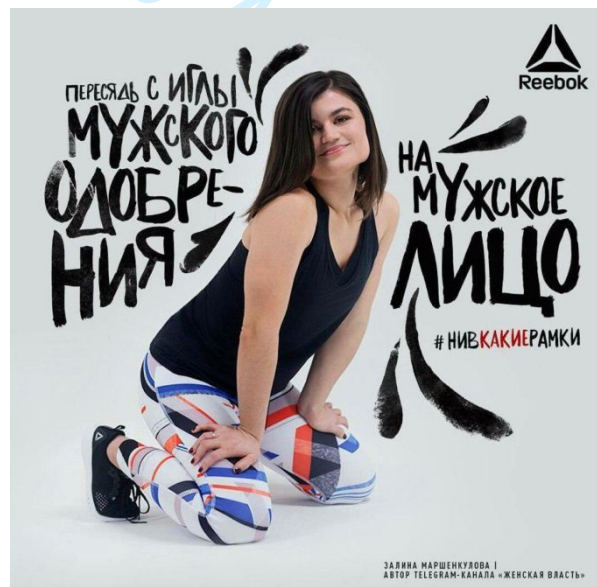
CUST_SUPPLEMENTARY_MATERIALS :No data available.

BEYOND ALL BOUNDARIES: WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND THE RUSSIAN SPORTSWEAR MARKET^a

In ordinary circumstances, Nikolay Borisov, the CEO of Nike Russia^b (further on – Nike), would not have thought twice about the competitors' promo campaigns and – would never have let them impact considerations of the company's values and value communication to the market. However, Reebok Russia's (further on – Reebok) new campaign represented a very different situation: the scandal around the promotion had grown so big and so fast that it became almost impossible to ignore. Speaking against the campaign, supporting the competitors, or saying nothing – all of these possible choices for Nike meant taking a position in the discussion, in which they already had been involved, whether anyone in the company wanted so or not.

Background

It all started on one of those days when you couldn't tell whether it was warm or cold outside – winter never really came to Russia in 2019. It was early February, and it felt like Moscow got stuck in endless late autumn weather. The anticipation of an early spring lightened everyone's mood, but it had been hard to ignore the dread of a possible snowstorm hitting the city at any moment. Upon returning to the office from a meeting, Borisov received a notification in a work chat discussion. The message said to check out Reebok's Instagram and included a screen capture of a post with a young woman standing assertively on a familiar grey background (see Picture 1). Borisov had never seen this woman before. "It seems that Reebok Russia had finally worked out how to adopt the "be more human" international promo campaign", – thought Borisov after first glance. He had contemplated studying the new promo more thoroughly back at the office.



Picture 1. "Don't sit around hooked on male approval needle — sit on a man's face"
Source: Esquire²

"Be more human" was a famous international campaign launched in 2017 by Reebok (see Appendix A), which featured artists and athletes including Gal Gadot, Danai Gurira, Gigi Hadid, Ariana Grande, Nathalie Emmanuel, and Katrin Davidsdottir. The spokeswomen told their

^a This case does not aim to assess the management practices and decisions described in it. To maintain confidentiality, some data and names have been changed by the authors.

^b The first Nike retail store opened in Moscow in 1993. The company "Delta-Sport" became a distributor of Nike in the CIS and Baltic countries. After 10 years, Nike established a subsidiary for the sale of Nike LLC products; this allowed Nike-branded products to move freely on the Russian market. To the date of the case, Nike LLC remained the official importer and representative of Nike in Russia.²⁷

personal stories of overcoming barriers to become their best selves. The slogans used in the ad urged girls not to be afraid of their strength (e.g., "I am unlimited, my strong goes on and on", "We change the world every time we lead by example", etc.). The campaign celebrated women who help bring about positive change in the world: "brands have long looked for ways to target women, and Reebok was launching one of its most significant women's campaigns to date, featuring a star roster of artists, athletes, and activists"¹⁸. Since the translation of the name of the campaign to the Russian language posed evident difficulties (i.e., it translates to either "be more like a man" or "be more human-like"), Reebok had taken some time to try to adopt it.

Upon entering the building, Borisov's phone had started to vibrate from a consecutive set of messages in the chatroom. He received links to various marketing and news media, critically discussing Reebok's new promo campaign. By the time he had been ready to take a good look at the ads, which caused such a commotion in the media, he learned that they were already deleted from the competitor's Instagram. He then went through the article links and studied the ads: it appeared that the campaign only loosely resembled the original international promotion.

The three models in the pictures were an MMA fighter, a wrestling champion, and for a reason that was not immediately apparent – a Blogger of a feministic Telegram channel. The new campaign was hashtagged #beyondallboundaries and contained assertive messages (see Appendix B), such as: "Covered my nipples so that you don't cut yourself", "My body, my business", and "When they say "carry her in his arms" I imagine myself in a coffin". However, the ad that initiated the most buzz was the Blogger in a sitting pose with a message: "Don't sit around hooked on male approval needle — sit on a man's face" (see Picture 1).

Borisov always had been a strong supporter of the company's policy to never publicly react to competitors' campaigns. Many large competitors from other industries were known to engage in Twitter feuds and actively ridicule social media exchanges (e.g., Sberbank and Tinkoff banks, Yandex Go and Delivery club delivery services, etc.). Nike had been firmly focused on Nike regardless of competitors' statements. However, Reebok's campaign targeted one of the most prospective market segments – women in sports, which Nike had been attracting for the past several years. As of summer 2018, only 15% of women in Russia pursued sports on a regular basis¹, which indicated immense growth potential for the segment. Although speaking in terms of market shares, Reebok was not the top competitor for the Nike brand in the Russian market (see Table 1), they both had been consistently targeting the women's segment for years.

Table 1. Volume and shares for the Russian sportswear market for 2018/2019.

| Brand/ Year | 2018 | 2019 | Growth |
|-------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Adidas | 8,10% | 8,30% | 0,20% |
| Nike | 6,70% | 7% | 0,30% |
| Demix | 4% | 4% | 0,00% |
| Decathlon | 4% | 3,90% | -0,10% |
| Outventure | 3,50% | 3,60% | 0,10% |
| Columbia | 3,50% | 3,50% | 0,00% |
| Reebok | 3,10% | 3,10% | 0,00% |
| Bosco Sport | 3,10% | 2,10% | -1,00% |
| Skechers | 2,20% | 2,30% | 0,10% |
| Puma | 1,90% | 2,50% | 0,60% |
| Other | 59,90% | 59,70% | -0,20% |

| Total | 100% | 100% | 0% |
|---------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Market volume | 411 205 mln rub. | 433 356,1 mln rub. | +22 151,1 mln rub |

Source: www.portal-euromonitor.com

Assuming that the competitor's campaign's reaction could have uncovered interesting consumer insights, which Nike would have been able to use later on, Borisov asked the marketing department to keep an eye on the situation. In addition, he asked the team to come back to him with a professional opinion on the ads from a few retailers, with whom the company had close relations and some of the active customers from the target groups. The gathered feedback from the partners and consumers was mixed: some found the ad funny and provocative, others – tasteless and on the verge of being offensive. However, everyone expressed the same opinion – the campaign didn't have the potential of being influential enough or cause any severe long-term commotion.

Public outrage

The next day Borisov learned that Reebok had re-uploaded the images on Instagram minus the "needle" banner, which caused the most stir. They were accompanied by the following message from the company:

"Reebok has given the floor to girls who have something to say and who are not shy about being themselves. Their life principles are somewhat at odds with the existing patterns about the role of women in society; therefore, their words can be perceived ambiguously.

Being equally respectful to all existing opinions is one of the principles of Reebok. The brand considered it necessary to give an opportunity to speak to the main characters of the project, who are professionally engaged in the traditionally "non-female" sport - mixed martial arts.

Unfortunately, after the publication of some pictures, it became clear that part of the content cannot be published on behalf of the brand according to the age policy of the social network. Nevertheless, publications are still available in the accounts of the heroines of the campaign. Reebok continues to support those who choose an active lifestyle, changing through sport and fitness, while remaining themselves.⁸"

The situation was different from the previously received insights. It became evident to Borisov that the campaign had officially gone viral – all major internet media reported thousands of Russian social media users taking part in trashing Reebok on Instagram and other social media platforms. Almost 16 thousand people took part in the massive Internet protest against the sports brand and wrote over 25,000 negative messages regarding the campaign, which generated a noticeable engagement – 127,000 user reactions³. Before being deleted from Reebok's YouTube account, the video supporting the campaign gathered 2,3 thousand dislikes (against 355 likes) within hours after publication². Social media listening even revealed traces of a boycott movement taking place («switching to Nike», «New Balance forever»)¹².

According to media sources, the hate was generally targeted at Reebok for misrepresenting the original international campaign's message and allegedly exploiting feministic ideals for commercial purposes while supposedly doing it in bad taste. The hate was only further fueled by the company's decision to retract the ads. The company tried to blame its PR director for launching an uncoordinated campaign, which assumably was not approved by Reebok's management.

A popular Telegram channel, "Merciless PR man", commented on the events: "The companies *** [don't care] what and how they support: the main thing is that they will receive social approval and new customers - because all non-feminists have already seen their traditional ads, and they

1
2 ***[don't care]. I don't understand this decision: it is as if the brand calls to get off the needle of
3 male approval, but it's in no hurry to get off the needle itself." ²
4

5 A large portion of the criticism fell on the Blogger as the message author, who later also turned
6 out to be the head of the marketing agency hired to execute the campaign by Reebok. Social media
7 users expressed outrage at the slogan's alleged bad taste, some even considering it "menacing".
8 "Because it's time to stop worrying about what others think of you, stop being afraid of being NOT
9 THE GOOD KIND of woman, stop adjusting your life and your looks to what your partner or
10 neighbor said," – she expressed in an earlier reaction to the campaign²³.
11
12

13 According to the comments on social media, men were offended by the aggressive tone of the
14 campaign². Many women felt upset about the unconditional message of the campaign, the
15 perceived judgment of the "traditional" Russian woman lifestyle, the unwanted advice on sexual
16 practices, and its politicizing²: "And why would [you] recommend sexual practices? Did I ask
17 you? This is a direct violation of boundaries, it seems to me. That is anyone who does not practice
18 domination and facesitting is sitting on a certain kind of needle. Oh well. How is this better than
19 what we are fighting with? And feminism is like a new ad inventory. » – exclaimed a female PR
20 specialist, cited by Esquire².
21
22

23 Other brands began to play on social media with the phrase "Don't sit around hooked on male
24 approval needle — sit on a man's face." For example, Samsung Russia tweeted: "sit on [change
25 to] the Samsung Galaxy - we have no boundaries"; Aviasales.ru posted on social media: "switch
26 from the male approval needle to a flight to Vienna! Tickets are cheaper than the price of a pair of
27 sneakers"; Auto.ru portal advised women: "switch from the male approval needle to Matiz" (the
28 post was later deleted)²¹; the Ozon.ru online store offered men, on whose face Reebok suggested
29 to sit, moisturizing masks; the Sahar & Vosk beauty salon advised to do hair removal before
30 changing to a man's face. Quickly the ad became a meme, which spread to all parts of culture:
31 from art, advertising, and the entertainment industry to literature, politics, etc.²⁰
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33
34

35 **What are our girls made of?**

36
37 It was evident to Borisov that Reebok got involved in a media struggle of such a scale that it
38 became a significant challenge to cope. However, it wasn't entirely clear whether Reebok and Nike
39 were battling on one side in the same war. Nike in Russia had built a different communication
40 strategy with Russian women – through the celebration of Russian female athletes, showcasing
41 their capabilities and achievements, and inspiring the young generation to actively pursue sports.
42
43

44 In the past two years, Nike had plenty of successful and novel women-oriented initiatives, such as
45 Women's Day, Box rebels, Play like a goddess, Girl Talk events, Girls only tournaments, as well
46 as the Nike Box MSK community. However, the most notable and influential promotion was the
47 award-winning "What are our girls made of" music video (see Picture 2), which was aimed to
48 inspire young girls to try different kinds of sports. The video reached over ten mln views on
49 YouTube alone, over 110k likes, and received a Gold Lion award at the 2017 Cannes Lion
50 festival²⁴.
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Picture 2. "What are our girls made of"

Source: Nike Women / YouTube

The creators of the video had changed the children's song "From what?", in which the girls "are made of flowers, bells, glances, and gummies." In Nike's version, they were "made" of strength and fire and from aspirations, perseverance, independence, skill, will, and freedom from other people's opinions. According to media, the majority shared the video on social networks with delight: "people who shoot such videos are changing the world"; "never forget that we are made of fire, aspirations, and achievements!"; "when you watch the video and cry a little with joy, pride, mixed feelings, because Girl Power, because it's essential, because girls are made of what they do, and not because someone else says they should be like from the inside".⁶

It didn't take long for Nike and the "What are our girls made of" campaign to start getting mentioned and compared to Reebok's #beyondallboundries. The Village published an article based on internet users' citations, which was called "Switching to Nike before they got me on my face"⁷. TJ journal wrote that while the most important thing that Nike gave the girls viewing the ad was the opportunity to choose from different female images, "Reebok followed the path of the majority, making a choice in one direction, and therefore received a wave of indignation"⁹. Forbes published an opinion piece, saying that as Nike's "What Our Girls Are Made of" campaign "focuses on overcoming in sports, Reebok's campaign focuses on overcoming sexual addiction and the battle of the sexes for some reason; after the brand removed the post from the Web, everything began to look completely stupid and look like a sham - they performed strongly, and then got scared"¹⁰. Talking about #beyondallboundries, the BBC gave examples of other failed "feminist campaigns", and then contrasted them all with the famous Nike ad, stating: "However, there are examples of successful campaigns. So, earlier, one of the main competitors of Reebok - Nike - had already made a pro-feminist video in Russian, "What are our girls made of."⁸

Women empowerment in Russia

When asked, Borisov always said that whether a girl can do anything was never the question in Russia. Nike's goal was instead – to showcase new opportunities for women interested in sports and inspire them to pursue them. Indeed, in the 2018 Olympics, the share of women in the Russian team was 47%, almost 5% higher than the total share of women in the games that year¹². According to a survey of the Russian population in 2019, women's participation in sports was voted as the third-best area with the most progress in achieving equality between men and women over the last 25 years⁴.

However, this time it seemed that Nike had been indirectly and involuntarily getting into a discussion on the legibility of feminism, where "What are our girls made of" was continuously mentioned as a mild and "healthy" version of feminism as opposed to Reebok's campaign. To

1
2 Borisov, this felt disrespectful to feminism, and in many ways – contrary to the original campaign's
3 idea. This was also alarming in light of the very peculiar attitude towards feminism in Russia – a
4 fact Nike knew firsthand. The "What are our girls made of" campaign in 2017 had already met
5 heavy criticism by both feminist activists and anti-feminists. Feminism activists disapproved that
6 the ad positioned a necessity to choose between a dress and a sports uniform and the need to fight
7 to be respected. They also spoke out against the promotion of high physical activity, which can
8 lead to injuries, wear and tear on the body, and problems with the reproductive system¹¹. Anti-
9 feminists were also very vocal on social media when the video had been published, contributing
10 to over 4k dislikes, negative comments, and even one unsuccessful law suit².

11
12
13 According to the WCIOM polls⁵, 42% of Russians believed that equality between men and women
14 "is possible only in certain areas". Just 38% believed that "full equality of rights is possible in all
15 areas." Almost half of the respondents did not support feminism as a social movement to achieve
16 gender equality in various spheres of public life. Slightly more than 30% approved of the feminist
17 agenda, considering it relevant to Russian society. According to Forbes¹⁹, among Russian women,
18 42% had a negative attitude to feminism, and another 37% did not care about it. The ambiguous
19 attitude towards feminism could be partially explained as rooted in persistent negative
20 connotations of this word, which was also a characteristic of the Soviet era, latent gender
21 discrimination in the public sphere, and the active propaganda of conservative values⁵.

22
23
24 To better understand the reaction in Russian society, it is necessary to share specific facts about
25 female empowerment and the perception of equality rights in Russia. According to the OECD^c,
26 in comparison to the world statistics, the situation with women's rights in Russia was positive²⁵:
27 general attitude towards working women outside the family, and women's participation in
28 decision-making has improved. At the same time, women were still overrepresented in the low-
29 paid job sector and part-time jobs. The majority of women consider there was a trade between
30 career and motherhood. The situation was also favorable in the sports industry, mainly because of
31 the Soviet Union's heritage, wherein in strategic fields, men and women were treated without a big
32 difference. Based on all of that, it was not surprising that the dialogue around discrimination and
33 equality was not very popular among Russians. However, regardless of the established rights, there
34 was a lack of real opportunities for women manifesting in a glass-ceiling effect and
35 underrepresentation of women among board members (7% according to the WEF report²⁶).
36 Another issue that can be noticed if Russia was compared with western countries was the unsafe
37 environment: the workplace harassment rate was still high in Russia, and it was not regulated by
38 law. It was accompanied by increasing home violence, which was also not regulated by law. Both
39 might have been a consequence of severe female underrepresentation among political decision-
40 makers²⁶.

41 42 43 44 45 46 **The challenge and the way ahead for Nike in Russia**

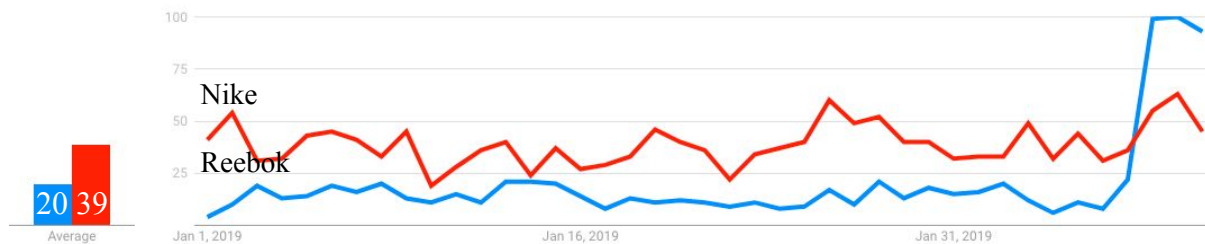
47
48 Although the differences between the messages to women from Reebok and Nike were apparent
49 to Nike's management team, a question remained of whether those differences would have been
50 as evident to the public, media, and retailers.

51
52 It was Friday night, and it wasn't much time to do anything before the weekend anyway. Before
53 leaving the office, Borisov asked the marketing department to track the campaign statistics, and
54 monitor and record significant online and social media conversations to assess the impact on
55 Monday morning. Two days after, marketing provided the following information:

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^c The OECD report "From promises to action: Addressing discriminatory social institutions to accelerate gender equality in G20 countries"²³

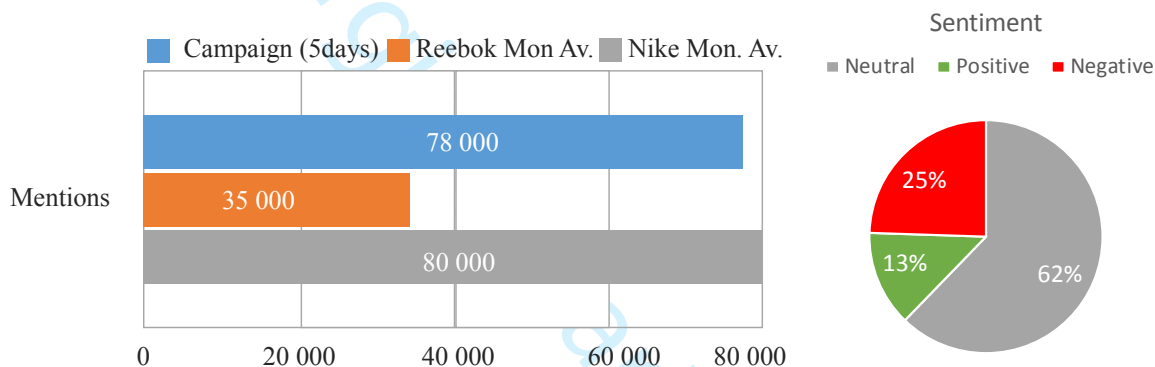
Fig 1. Google Trends search interest index* for Nike and Reebok 07.02.2019-10.02.2019



*Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means there was not enough data for this term.

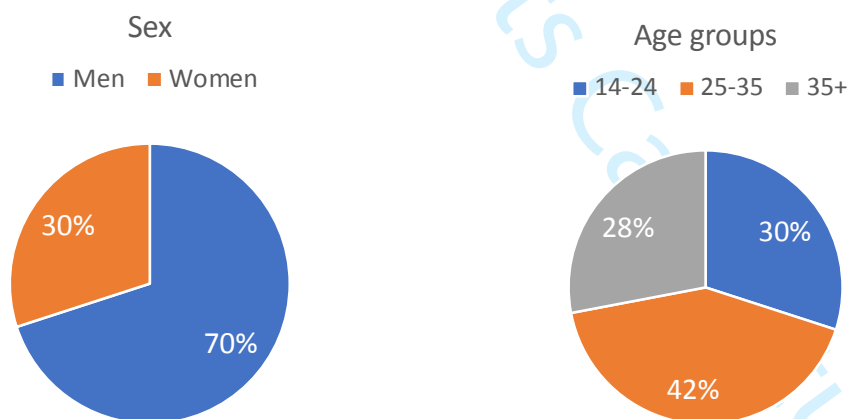
Source: Google Trends

Fig 2. YouScan analysis of brand name mentions and sentiment 07.02.2019-11.02.2019



Source: YouScan¹⁴

Fig 3. Brand Analytics analysis of Reebok's new mentions sources 07.02.2019-11.02.2019



Source: Brand Analytics¹³

Table 2. Comparison of Reebok's sales with previous year's estimates

| Reebok | 08.02.2018- 11.02.2018 | 08.02.2019- 11.02.2019 | Source |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Sales value | X | X+23% | The Village ¹⁵ |
| Quantity of goods sold | X | X+15% | |
| Sales via Ozon online shop | X | X+15% | Hi tech.mail.ru ¹⁶ |
| Demand for Lamoda online shop | X | X+57% | |

Table 3. Increase search queries/ sales for major C2C platforms 07.02.2019/10.02.2019

| | February, 7 | February, 10 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Yula online C2C platform | | |
| Reebok search query | X | X+20% |
| Nike search query | X | X+16% |
| Adidas search query | X | X+14% |
| Avito online C2C platform | | |
| Reebok sales | X | X+12% |

Source: Retailer¹⁷

“Could this lead to difficulties in promoting the image of a strong woman and women's sports as part of our ongoing and planned campaigns?” – Borisov contemplated on Monday morning preparing to dig into the data, – “does this have the potential to hinder the development of the whole segment, and should we maybe consider changing our principles and take a stand in the discussion?”.

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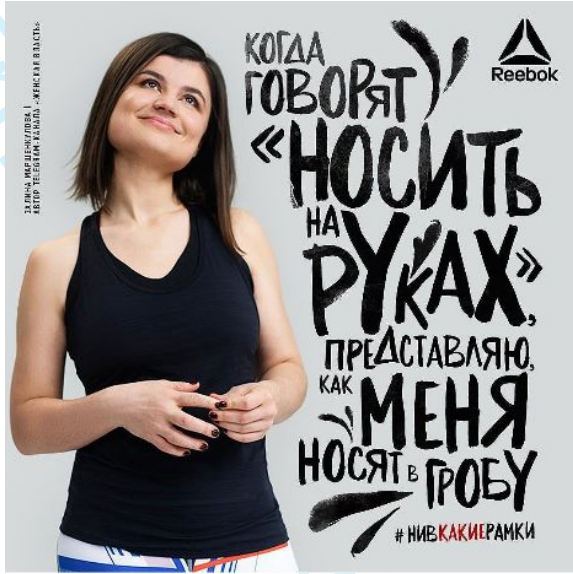
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Appendix A Examples of “Be more human” ads



Source: Reebok

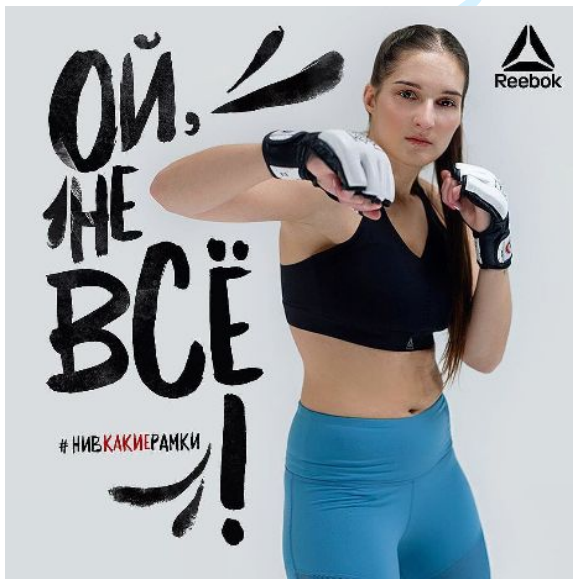
Appendix B. Examples of “Beyond all boundaries” ads



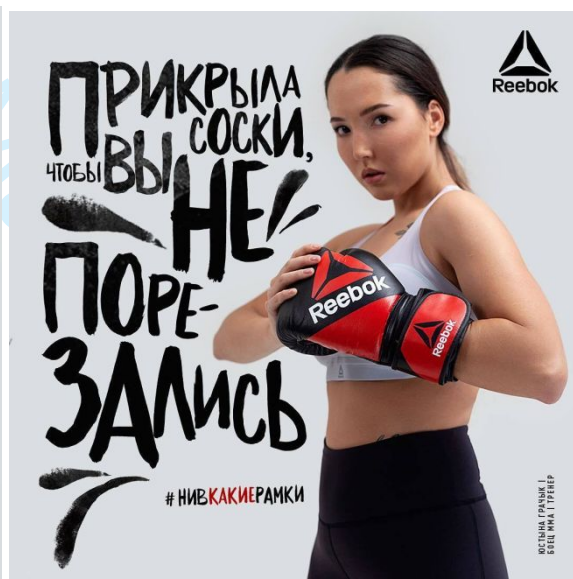
[“When they say “carry her in his arms” I imagine myself in a coffin”]



[“My body, my business”]



[“Just DONT forget it”].



[“Covered my nipples so that you don't cut yourself”]

Source: Reebok Russia

Teaching Note

BEYOND ALL BOUNDARIES: WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND THE RUSSIAN SPORTSWEAR MARKET

SYNOPSIS

In 2017, Nike Russia created one of the most successful and influential ad campaigns in the Russian women's sportswear market by encouraging young girls to try new sports. At the same time, Reebok launched a successful worldwide "be more human" campaign aimed at empowering women all around the globe. Two years after, Reebok Russia tried to localize the successful campaign while adjusting the message to be more assertive. As a result, the company met a country-wide outrage from both feminists and anti-feminists. The case centers around Nikolay Borisov, the CEO of Nike Russia, who was unexpectedly drawn into a provocative public discussion on the use of the female empowerment agenda for cause-related marketing. The case dilemma is set during mid-February 2019 and involves Borisov's assessment of the impact of the competitor's viral campaign on the market and choice of a reaction strategy to public outrage.

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

This case is appropriate for an undergraduate or graduate-level curriculum for courses dedicated to or including viral marketing, doing business in emerging markets, corporate social responsibility, and consumer behavior. Before engaging with the case, the students should be aware of essential management-, marketing- and economics-related concepts and terms, such as strategy, positioning, brand image, and CSR.

1. Students need to be able to apply knowledge about approaches to estimate marketing campaigns' outcomes.
2. Students need to be able to assess potential opportunities and risks a brand might face when using important social issues in promotion campaigns.
3. Students need to be able to assess the impact of viral marketing campaigns from the various perspectives including that of competitors.

RESEARCH METHODS

To form the story behind the case, Nike Russia representatives were approached for background information, such as the acting Ecosystem Program Manager and the PR department. The case was based on primary data gathered during a series of 3 video interviews (each - about 40 minutes) with the acting CEO of Nike Russia during the period described in the case. The interviews took place in May 2021. Industry reports, organizational documents, social media posts, and news articles were used as secondary data. To maintain confidentiality, some data has been hidden (e.g., Table 2 and Table 3), and names have been changed by the authors. The description of timeframes and related events may have been modified to fit the storyline.

KEYWORDS AND SUBJECT CODE

CSS 8: Marketing

Keywords: Viral marketing, women empowerment, feminism, sportswear market, emerging markets

ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

1. Was Reebok's campaign overall efficient? Based on the suggested effectiveness assessment, how Borisov should have estimated the campaign's potential impact on Nike's sales and image?
2. What were the main challenges of using the female empowerment agenda for cause-related marketing in the Russian sportswear market?
3. What were the reasons for Nike not to react to Reebok's #beyondallboundaries campaign? Bring evidence and arguments.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

The additional materials include short video clips explaining the essential information a student should know before approaching the case.

1. Dan Ariely "Are we in control of our own decisions?", available at https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_ariely_are_we_in_control_of_our_own_decisions (accessed 31 May 2021)
2. "Russia's gender equality rating drops – WEF report", available at <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/12/17/russias-gender-equality-rating-drops-wef-report-a68643> (accessed 31 May 2021)

Additional readings:

3. "Five Ways To Productively Communicate With Customers During A Crisis" by Forbes. - available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/07/30/five-ways-to-productively-communicate-with-customers-during-a-crisis/?sh=5fe5e1c3509b>
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7. "The business case for purpose" by Harvard business review. - available at https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_gl/topics/digital/ey-the-business-case-for-purpose.pdf

SUGGESTED CORE READINGS

1. Cruz, D. and Fill, C., 2008. Evaluating viral marketing: isolating the key criteria. Marketing Intelligence and Planning, 26(7), pp.743-758.

2. Brønn, P.S. and Vrioni, A.B., 2001. Corporate social responsibility and cause-related marketing: an overview. *International journal of Advertising*, 20(2), pp.207-222.
3. "Addressing discriminatory social institutions to accelerate gender equality in G20 countries", OECD Development center - available at https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/OECD_DEV_W20-report_FINAL.pdf

TEACHING PLAN AND TIMING

| Title and timing | Description |
|---|---|
| Introduction <i>10 minutes</i> | The instructor can get the class to discuss how the students differentiate between the major sportswear brands: how is their positioning different, and which factors impact the choice to buy the brand. At the end of the discussion, the instructor can ask the class to vote on whether they consider their brand choice and choice factors – rational and logical |
| Prerequisite learning <i>15 minutes</i> | The instructor could show Dan Ariely's Ted talk clip referenced under additional materials illustrating the context of the study |
| Assignment question 1 <i>30 minutes</i> | The instructor presents the statistics of social media listening and available sales information regarding the campaign and gets the class to discuss how the actual data on sales corresponds to the alleged public reaction and Borisov's fears as described in the case |
| Assignment questions 2 and 3 <i>40 minutes</i> | The instructor gets the class to work in pairs to develop a suggested action plan for the company and root it in assessing the peculiarities of women's equality position in Russia. – the instructor randomly selects two pairs of students to present their plans – and then presents a framework given in the teaching note exhibit to assist the students in making decisions in the future |
| Conclusion <i>5 minutes</i> | Conclusion restating the critical learning points or reading the postscript |

ANALYSIS OF ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

Question 1. Was Reebok's campaign overall efficient? Based on the suggested efficiency assessment, how Borisov should have estimated the campaign's potential impact on Nike's sales and image?

Firstly, it is important to determine what is the object of efficiency evaluation. While different answers could be given during the initial discussion (such as PR-related consequences, competitive positioning of Reebok VS Nike, and social impact), the correct level of analysis concerning Reebok's objectives is – a promotional campaign. Next, it is necessary to define the type of a promotional campaign: celebrity endorsement? PR campaign? Viral marketing campaign? Cause-related marketing? – all of them would have different and specific efficiency indicators. At the beginning of the analysis, all of those options could be used. However, while moving to the assessment of efficiency, the focus would quickly fall into such indicators as word-of-mouth, speed of information spreading, and sentiment, inevitably moving the discussion to evaluate what is a viral campaign.

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5 The pre-reading (Cruz, Fill, 2008) should have introduced the target audience for the case to the
6 classification of *random* versus *placed* virals. Based on whether the object of efficiency analysis
7 is determined as either random or placed, different approaches could be determined to evaluate the
8 efficiency. Particularly, with random virals, such indicators as sales may not play a big or any role
9 in comparison to placed virals according to Cruz and Fill (2008).
10

11 Regardless of how the object of analysis is determined, the company objectives must be taken into
12 account, and the determined set of indicators is justified based on the understanding of the object
13 of analysis. Statistics from the last part of the case must be used as well.
14
15

16 Typical mistakes may include:

- 17 1. Concluding that the campaign is unsuccessful solely based on available sales statistics
18 disregarding the awareness-focused objectives set by the company.
- 19 2. Concluding that the campaign is successful solely based on sentiment analysis and
20 awareness indicators disregarding the differentiated impact the campaign had on different
21 segments of consumers.
22
23

24 In determining the social impact of the campaign (if used as an efficiency indicator), it is necessary
25 to establish:

- 26 A. The complexity of the general attitude of Russian consumers towards the discussion of
27 feminism and women empowerment.
28

29 In Russia, the conversation dedicated to women's rights and feminism was still controversial.
30 According to the available data, about the same number of respondents believed women's equality
31 could be achieved only partially (42%) as those who thought it was possible to achieve it fully
32 (38%). This distribution has been reflected in the reaction to the campaign among consumers – it
33 was close to polarizing. While social media reaction towards the campaign itself was negative
34 (2.3K "dislikes" vs 355 "likes") with only 13% positive mentions across platforms, sales at the
35 same time increased up to 15-20%. The brand has been mentioned 12 times more often than usual.
36 It could be argued that Reebok's reputation was not significantly hurt despite the adverse effect of
37 public reaction towards the campaign, because of the polarized sentiment towards feminism in
38 Russia.
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41 In answering the second part of the question, it is important to consider the possibilities and
42 limitations of exploiting outcomes from increased attention towards women empowerment and its
43 relation to sportswear brands.
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46 The Nike brand became involuntarily involved in the conversation around the Reebok campaign
47 for several reasons:

- 48 1. The Nike brand was famous for its support for women's sports and for celebrating Russian
49 female athletes, who were showcased as examples of resourcefulness, capabilities, and
50 strengths to young girls. Despite the absence of clear feminist agenda from the brand itself,
51 consumers in Russia considered Nike's message of inspiration as a step toward women's
52 equality conversation.
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- 2.
- Several years before Reebok, Nike launched the campaign "What are our girls made of", which was a success (90K "likes" vs 1,6K "dislikes") and was considered among many consumers as a fine attempt to redefine stereotypes about female power.

Those reasons led to mentions of the Nike campaign, and the comparison of the general tone of the message they conveyed with that of Reebok, not favoring the latter. Some consumers publicly stated that they were switching from Reebok to Nike because of that. Sales of the Nike brand increased up to 16%. In this case, a decision-making process demonstrated a classic paradox described by Dan Ariely, where the choice of alternatives was determined by its relativity (Paris vs Rome choice). The same situation has happened with the case of the Reebok-Nike comparison, although there were other options to switch among sportswear brands: consumers started to compare brands solely based on how they addressed an issue of female power. In conclusion, it is safe to say that the discussion around Reebok positively influenced the Nike brand.

Question 2. What were the main challenges of using the female empowerment agenda for cause-related marketing in the Russian sportswear market?

To answer this question, two aspects of CSR and cause-related marketing should be taken into account: the impact of cross-cultural differences in acceptance of CSR, and the impact of consumer skepticism. The target audience for the case should be familiar with both concepts from the pre-reading (Brønn and Vrioni, 2001).

It would be helpful to take a relative perspective on the state of women empowerment and equality in Russia by comparing it with other countries and regions, such as western countries (e.g., Western Europe, the USA). This should help to better understand certain specifics regarding the position of women in society, issues related to career development, and the perception of the equal rights movement in Russia (WEF and OECD reports suggested as a pre-reading material would help to do this task).

When brands enter a market like Russia, where the issue has existed and has been discussed but still was at a delicate stage, it is essential to educate consumers about the values that the brand supports and shares. The issue of inequality might seem ambiguous because of its subtlety and existing norms of traditional patriarchal society. It was not surprising that it led to confusion when brands started an open discussion. Nike chose an efficient way to inspire and empower women to be athletes and to work with the issue of shaping female identity as strong, which is usually associated with sports. On the other hand, Reebok chose controversial positioning of their message, which didn't resonate with consumers, who were unprepared to discuss this matter at the level to which the brand engaged them. Based on the case, it can be assumed that a more subtle approach to promoting female empowerment would have been more suitable for consumers like Russians, i.e., with a lower level of education about equality and feminism and a lack of support from legislative institutions. However, as the Reebok campaign also had a certain recognition and support from consumers, part of consumers has been ready for a stronger representation of the feministic agenda.

The other major set of challenges related to the question can be connected to consumer skepticism. Although the case doesn't explicitly state the initial and corresponding level of skepticism for

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3 consumers in the Russian sportswear market, it is possible to assume a high level of skepticism for
4 the market based on comparing consumer reactions to the two campaigns, and the viral campaign
5 results. It is important to distinguish that skepticism in marketing is in general a factor that pertains
6 to an organization or commercial practices – not social issues. The notion of skepticism would be
7 very appropriate for discussions of the suitability of the female empowerment agenda for the
8 sportswear market or apparel in general, or the impact of existing consumer knowledge about
9 previous cause-related marketing campaigns (such as Nike's).

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13 **Question 3.** What were the reasons for Nike not to react to Reebok's #beyondallboundaries
14 campaign? Bring evidence and arguments.

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16 While opinions of Nike's position to not react to the situation might differ, it is essential to
17 remember all the information about both cases of using the feminist agenda in Russia and the
18 degree of negativity the Reebok campaign has received.

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21 A) To support Nike's decision **not** to react.

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23 First, for Nike's image, the discussion around Reebok would have had a positive influence: those
24 who did not like Reebok's campaign supported Nike either by buying products or claiming their
25 intentions, and those who appreciated the Reebok campaign had no reason to feel worse about
26 Nike. If the company had expressed its position, Nike could have lost part of the potential or active
27 consumers: if it criticized the campaign – those who liked it, and if it supported – those who did
28 not appreciate it. Any reaction, most likely, would have remained overshadowed by the discussion
29 of Reebok unless it would have brought even more controversy. Considering the amount of effort
30 and time any established brand would spend on delivering such a profound statement, it probably
31 would not be worth the outcome.

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34 The agenda of Nike towards women's support was aimed to celebrate and encourage women in
35 sports. On the other hand, Reebok has launched a debate about the female role in general and the
36 place of women in society, even considering the topic of sexuality. While both discussion streams
37 could be loosely related to the feminist agenda, directions and the focus of a central message
38 differed significantly. In that case, the reaction would have forced Nike to participate and be
39 associated with the discussion they initially were not a part of.

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42 B) Benefits the brand could have had if Nike had **joined** the discussion.

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45 Overall, the situation around Reebok has sparked an interest in the sportswear market. Suppose
46 Nike addressed the issue with new products or activities which were not directly connected with
47 the campaign but invited a more positive dialogue about the same issue. In that case, they could
48 have possibly had some significant financial success.

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51 The silence from the brand might have been considered negatively by some consumers. As
52 mentioned earlier, the knowledge and dialogue around female empowerment were fragmented
53 among Russian consumers and associated with the courage to be yourself, strong and independent,
54 which was the main message of the famous Nike campaign. A reminder from the brand about the
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3 support of female athletes might have brought more certainty or inspiration to Nike's consumers
4 and ensured their loyalty.
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7 **KEY LEARNINGS**

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- 10 1. Students will broaden their understanding of the role of cultural peculiarities, their
- 11 importance, and mechanisms of customer learning in localizing global marketing
- 12 campaigns.
- 13 2. The case introduces consequences of unexpected spill-over of viral marketing and PR
- 14 scandals on the competition.
- 15 3. The case develops the students' ability to determine and assess the impact of viral
- 16 marketing campaigns from the perspectives of various stakeholders of the organization.
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