

## Social media gaffs of 2016 so far (yes, already)

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We haven't even made it to the end of January yet, but already there have been enough blunders, oversights, inaccuracies and indiscretions from international **brands** on **social** media that we can compile a list of the top mistakes to learn from (and let's be honest, laugh at) from 2016 so far.

All of the following stories are prime examples on what NOT to do in the year ahead when trying to engage your global audiences.

Look and learn from these spectacular errors in judgement and ensure you don't make the same mistakes with your international **digital** strategy.

### **Coca-Cola lands itself in political hot water over Crimea blunder**

Without doubt the most controversial **social** media blunder of the year so far is courtesy of **Coca-Cola**, who managed to provoke fury from both their Russian and Ukrainian customers with their ill-advised Happy New Year message.

The visual, shared across Russian **social** media platform VK, depicted a cartoon featuring a snow-covered map of Russia (so far, so innocuous).

The issue came when fans noticed the map had omitted Kaliningrad, which used to be East Prussia but is now Russian owned, the Kuril Islands (seized by Japan in 1945 and still disputed) and the highly contested territory of Crimea.

The mistake angered Russian patriots but unfortunately **Coca-Cola's** misguided reaction to these initial complaints managed to spark much greater controversy and cause the mishap to gain viral momentum.

[https://twitter.com/team\\_portnova\\_z/status/684391173100822529](https://twitter.com/team_portnova_z/status/684391173100822529)

Instead of simply deleting the offending image and apologising for getting involved in such a highly political topic, **Coca-Cola** decided instead to post an amended version of the map, this time including Kaliningrad, the Kuril Islands and, most controversially, Crimea. This move not only

forced **Coca-cola** executives to face some uneasy questions regarding their views on whether Crimea does in fact belong to Russia, but sparked a **social** media campaign from Ukrainians imploring people to boycott the **brand** using the hashtag **#BanCocaCola**. Moral of the story: Do your research and make sure you understand local cultural and political sensitivities inside and out before producing localised content. **DC comics goes viral for translating content from 'Pakistanian'** DC comics were a hot topic of **social** media conversation for all the wrong reasons earlier this month after an editor's note within the Superman/ Wonder Woman Annual #2 claimed all dialogue had been "translated from Pakistanian". The blunder caused many a facepalm moment across the web with users taking offence to the fact that DC Comics appeared astonishingly ignorant about Pakistan's culture. The comic always indicates when speech has been translated, but clearly whoever constructed this issue had failed to do their homework.

<https://twitter.com/thekarachikid/status/684242379407134720>

Had they bothered to consult a local (or even done a **Google** search) then they would have been aware that Pakistan's official language is Urdu, although a large proportion of the population also speak Punjabi.

Naturally users took to **Twitter** to voice their exasperation with a series of hilarious tongue-in-cheek posts aimed at the official DC comic **Twitter** handle and towards the editor **Andrew Marino**.

This is a perfect example of why, when it comes to referencing other cultures, it is essential to check and double check your facts are right before publishing anything.

If you make a mistake, then **social** media can be quick to pick up on it and people will often be merciless in criticising and humiliating your **brand**.

### **MTV Australia's offensive tweet during the Golden Globes**

Sometimes an official **Twitter** account tweets something so incredibly offensive that you assume they must have been hacked but unfortunately, in this incident from the MTV Australia, that wasn't the case.

In a truly astonishing lapse of judgement, MTV Australia published a tweet asking where the subtitles were (and purporting to not understand what was being said) when **America Ferrera** and **Eva Longoria** were presenting an award at the Golden Globes – speaking entirely in English.

<https://twitter.com/ellaceron/status/68637407497775616>

The tweet did have some context to it as it was published in relation to a joke between the two actors about how Hispanic celebrities are often mistaken for one another, but many still found it offensive and felt MTV Australia had taken the playful humour too far. This led to a barrage of **social** media criticism, leading MTV Australia to delete the offending tweet and offer up an

apology. This too was also poorly received as it was written in an informal tone leading many to believe it was less than sincere. A second, more direct apology was hastily released to appease the baying crowd. So, if you are thinking of posting something humorous that treads the fine line between funny and offensive always be aware that you are playing with fire. Make sure you are prepared to handle the backlash if your “funny” message ignites fury and irritation rather than laughter. This is particularly true if your joke is aimed at a specific culture or minority group. It's detrimental PR for any **brand** to risk being labelled as discriminatory. **Seoul Secret's shocking 'White Makes You Win' campaign** Thai beauty **brand** Seoul Secret shocked users across the web with their highly questionable **advertising** campaign for skin whitening supplements. The video featured successful Thai actress and singer **Chris Horwang** speaking about her career and claiming that it was her white skin that enabled her to get so far in life.

<https://twitter.com/LisaReneeJones/status/685887225494671366>

She goes on to speak about the importance of maintaining her pale complexion and how she might fade into obscurity if she failed to maintain her skin-whitening regime. At this point in the video her skin turns black, blending into the black backdrop, to demonstrate her point – oh dear.

As the complaints started to build momentum on **Twitter**, and the video began going viral with users sharing it in disbelief, Seoul Secret issued a statement saying, “We would like to express a heartfelt apology and thank you for all the comments. Currently, we have removed the video clip, related advertisements, and other planned materials to show our responsibility in this incident.”

This was not enough to make the issue disappear however and several high-profile **Twitter** users were still posting their condemnation of the campaign even after the apology was released.

So what can we learn from the disaster that was this campaign? To begin with it is worth noting that in Thailand skin whitening products are widely used, and not viewed as controversially as they are in Europe or the US.

While the Thai audience might not have been shocked by the campaign name “white makes you win”, Seoul Secrets failed to foresee that as **YouTube** is a global **social** media platform, their video would reach a worldwide audience.

Inevitably, for users outside of Thailand, where skin whitening is far from mainstream, the whole premise of the campaign caused offence.

Considering how different audiences might interpret your content, particularly if you are planning to promote it via international **social** media platforms, is essential to avoid embarrassment.

**Social** media is now a truly international platform, so whether you are creating localised content, or simply referencing another culture through your official **brand** channels, it is imperative that thorough research is undertaken in order to avoid making gaffs like these we have witnessed in the past month.

From being aware of cultural nuances and sensitivities through to ensuring your facts are in order, taking the time to understand a culture before launching into activity will help ensure you don't alienate, offend or discriminate against your intended audience, or anybody else who might happen to come across your campaign.

Localised content can be extremely powerful when it is executed correctly, it just requires some research, planning and consideration.

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