Communicating anti-racism

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CHAPTER 3

We can’t ‘Just do it’ alone!

An analysis of Nike’s (potential) contributions to anti-racism in soccer

Introduction

Anti-racism in soccer culture has seen the object of its concern change dramatically over the past 30 years. Initially, the focus was exclusively on the violent behaviour of hooligan minorities and their susceptibility to fascist political ideologies. Since then, studies looking more closely at racism in fan- and club cultures have shown that racist expressions in soccer culture are too heterogeneous to be singularly caused by the moral defects in the minds of subgroups of soccer fans (Garland and Rowe, 1999, Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001, King, 2004, Burdsey, 2004a). A number of authors have proposed that it is more constructive to regard racism regarded as a problem to be intrinsic to contemporary soccer cultures (Garland and Rowe, 1999, Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001). The culture of soccer has been shown to reflect and reproduce social exclusions based on racial, ethnic or religious differences. For instance, the under representation of certain ethnic minorities in the stands and the clubs (e.g. Asians in Britain, see Burdsey, 2004b), traditional club cultures that alienate members from other ethnic groups (Duyvendak and Veldboer, 2006) and the ethnicity of club directorates are now also seen as expressions of racialized inequality and abuse in soccer culture (Garland and Rowe, 2001).

This point of departure presents anti-racist campaigns with a profound challenge. No longer can they suffice with the singling out of racist ‘hooligan’ groups of fans that openly subscribe to racist ideologies. Mere increases in security measures during matches or the
prohibition of certain chants and curses at the football grounds are insufficient to address the problem at its root. Participation of fans, players and club staff members at the local level are now seen as crucial elements in such initiatives (Holden and Wilde, 2004, Horne, 1996, Jones, 2002, Osler and Starkey, 2002). Positive anti-racist effects are attributed, for example, to grassroots initiatives that generate discussions amongst fans and players about experiences of abuse and exclusion (such as home made soccer fanzines that engage with the issue of racism and diversity at the club) (Ibid.).

However, a genuine transformation of the culture of soccer may also benefit from the participation and support of other, previously uninvolved actors within soccer culture. This chapter examines the potential contribution of multinational corporations. In particular, it focuses on the content and reception of a recent anti-racist media campaign by soccer’s leading sportswear producing company Nike. The main question that will be addressed is whether, and in what ways, multinational corporations like Nike have a (potential) role in the ongoing fight against soccer racism. Nike is a logical choice for the investigation of the potential of multinational corporations to anti-racism because it is deeply implicated in the ongoing commercialization, transformation and globalization of soccer culture (Goldman and Papson, 1999, Miller, Lawrence, McKay and Rowe, 1999). Over the last two decades, the company’s highly successful advertising strategies have managed to make the Nike brand synonymous with an authentic love of sports and the power to transcend individual hardships through sports (Goldman and Papson, 1999). Due to Nike’s unparalleled economic success, both its representations of sports culture as well as the popular commodified lifestyles it supports, have become an undeniable part of globalizing soccer culture (Ibid, Miller, Lawrence, McKay and Rowe, 1999). Given this position of cultural authority, the company also has, in theory at least, the potential to contribute to the development of more inclusive soccer cultures around the world.

Nike’s contributions to anti-racism will be addressed through a case study of their most expensive anti-racist campaign to date, called ‘Stand up Speak up’. This study focused on the ways in which local Dutch soccer players and fans in the Netherlands made sense of ‘Stand up Speak up’. These reactions are analysed together with the (visual) content of the campaign to determine to what extent Nike contributed to the struggle against soccer racism. In so doing, we

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not only assess the ways in which the company does or does not succeed by contemporary standards, but also what its potential might be under ideal circumstances.

In the following, the changing demands placed on anti-racist initiatives in recent years will first be addressed. Then Nike’s historically developed position with regards to corporate responsibility and anti-racism in particular will be discussed. After that, results are presented from a survey amongst Amsterdam soccer players and fans. This is followed by an analysis of the discursive and visual codes of the ‘Stand up Speak up’ campaign. The paper is concluded with a discussion of the transformative potential of Nike, given its unique position in European soccer culture and its increasing dedication to corporate responsibility and an abstract notion of ‘authentic sports’.

**Anti-racist strategies**

One of the main problems confronting anti-racism is that it has proven exceptionally hard to agree upon a common definition of the problem of racism (Augostinos & Every, 2007; Taguieff, 2001). Empirical studies have demonstrated how older, ‘blatant’ forms of racism may have become less common but in their place many other forms of expression have come up. These different manifestations of racism have inspired an equal diversity of different theoretical conceptualisations labelled, among others, new (Solomos & Back, 1996), modern (McConahay, 1986), subtle (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), symbolic (Sears, 1998), cultural (Giroux, 1993), institutional (Anthias & Lloyd, 2002) and aversive forms of racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1998). This proliferation of new terms and theories illustrates academic disagreements about the nature of racism and which individual, social and societal phenomena may qualify as racist (Augostinos & Every, 2007). On the one hand, some scholars have proposed that subtle racism is widespread in contemporary societies and permeates nearly all domains of everyday and institutional life (Essed, 1991). Others, such as Robert Miles, have warned that increasing the number of phenomena considered to be racism amounts to a ‘conceptual inflation’, which risks losing sight of the distinctiveness of racism from other forms of social exclusion (Miles, 1989). Somewhat in the same vein, Sniderman & Tetlock (1986) have argued that much of what is thus considered ‘subtle racism’ may simply be an expression of liberal-conservative political ideals.

Anti-racism has suffered the most from this theoretical confusion as it has been founded on earlier definitions of racism. While these have been outdated, there has not emerged a clear new definition of the problem of racism and its solution (Anthias & Lloyd, 2002; Gilroy, 1992;
Taguieff, 2001). Traditional anti-racist discourses tend to assume, for example, that racist behaviour is intentional, coherent and grounded in a firm commitment to a racist ideology (Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 2001). Studies have demonstrated, however, how everyday racism is expressed in many different and often contradictory ways (Augustinos & Every, 2007). Moreover, people engaging in racist speech or behaviour often do not appear to be guided by a singular racist ideology (Rattansi, 1992). Rattansi notes, for example, that some people that committed racist hate crimes also had close friends from the same ethnic communities they had directed their violence at (Ibid.). Furthermore, racism has also been shown to occur in many instances without any apparent conscious intentions on the part of perpetrators. Experimental studies on ‘aversive racism’ have shown, for example, that white Americans were completely unaware that they helped blacks Americans in distress less often than whites when the responsibility to help was shared with others (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1998). These sorts of contradictions illustrate a level of incoherence of individual behaviour that cannot be accounted for by the notion of an ideologically motivated, rationally acting individual ‘racist’.

Scholars have therefore argued racism needs to be conceptualised in other terms that emphasise the discourses and social practices through which cultural difference or ‘race’ becomes a salient marker in everyday culture and leads to social exclusions (Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001). Racism should not be considered in the singular but treated as a collection of contextually specific ‘racisms’ (Rattansi, 1992). These various racisms are seen as contingent expressions of a more generally racialized culture in which ‘race’ and cultural difference determine to a smaller or larger extent the relations between different social groups (Rattansi, 1992; 2005).

The racialization of soccer culture is evident, in part, in openly hostile acts of discrimination and abuse committed by hooligan minorities. However, it is also expressed in more mundane day-to-day interactions where racist discourses implicitly structure the relations between participants. It can also be evident in decision-making processes or the allocation of resources, biased player allocation to particular positions on the soccer team and a range of other practices in soccer culture (Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001). These racialized structures and social relations reproduce racial inequality and constitutes a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the emergence of the visible expressions of racism such as verbal or physical abuse. However, racialization can also be a part of non-hostile or even friendly interactions amongst
different individuals in soccer culture, making it a hard target for strategies that seek to problematize its presence.

Anti-racist campaigns in soccer have generally failed to take the heterogeneous nature of racism into account (Garland and Rowe, 1999a). The assumption that soccer culture as a whole is implicated in the problem of racism problematizes the notions of the perpetrator and the victim through which the anti-racist struggle is commonly constructed. In traditional anti-racism, perpetrators or ‘racists’ are assumed to share identification with a racist ideology (Back, Crabbe & Solomos, 2001). As a consequence, the problem of racism is reduced to the presence of ‘racist hooligans’ that simply need to be ‘kicked out’ of soccer culture. In practice, however, many people involved in racialized relations, and even many of the fans who shout racist abuse from the terraces, do not see themselves as racists at all (See Chapter 2). Many participants in soccer culture do not harbour such deeply felt racist ideological convictions but nonetheless may occasionally notice how particular assumptions about ‘racial’, ethnic or religious differences guide their perceptions, discourse and behaviour at the soccer pitches. When abuse results from these more mundane experiences, they are constructed unfortunate by-products of an emotional involvement with the game (Ibid.). As a result, many instances of racism are reduced to meaningless ‘accidents’ or ‘moments of weakness’ and thus are often accepted as a regrettable ‘part of the game’ (see Chapter 2).

Anti-racism in soccer has also been criticized for assuming that all victims of racism face the same problems and are all discriminated against because they are black. Consequently, the specific forms of racism suffered by British Asians in soccer clubs has been ignored (Burdsey, 2004b, Jones, 2002). Moreover, by defining the victimized group as ‘black’, victims of different ethnic groups (i.e. Asians or Muslims) are marginalized in the struggle against racism and the specific forms of racism that they suffer are ignored (Jones, 2002).

This theoretical perspective suggests that the problem of racism cannot be resolved by a focus on racist hooligans alone. Campaigns against soccer racism need to address more than overt expressions of racist hostility or exclusion. To address the problem at its root, anti-racism needs to challenge more generally the role that racial, ethnic and religious differences play in soccer culture. This includes not only those forms of discourse and behaviour that are generally considered ‘racist’ in a given soccer culture. It also concerns those structures, discourses and practices that form the context within which racist thoughts can be meaningfully entertained and expressed. Such structures, discourses and practices may not generally be considered ‘racist’ and
the people who participate in them may prefer to consider themselves ‘non-racist’ (see Chapters 1 and 2). Nonetheless, their everyday discourses and practices are implicated in the processes of racialization of soccer culture and are also implicated in the solution to the problem of racism.

At present, nothing is known about the ways in which communication campaigns in particular contribute to the change of soccer culture. On the one hand, it is clear that this requires the careful construction of media messages that will address racism as a cultural problem. The discourse and representations of such a message ought to define both the problem and the actors in soccer culture in ways that do more justice to the various processes, contexts and actors involved (Garland & Rowe, 1999a). On the other hand, however, media reception theory suggests that the reception of such messages depends on the context within which these messages are interpreted (Hall, 1973). Both the content of the message as well as the reception context are therefore crucial to understand this process of communication and are thus addressed in sequence below.

**Nike’s advertisement strategies**

An understanding of Nike’s engagement with racism through the campaign ‘Stand up Speak up’ requires an appreciation of the company’s long standing involvement in the reproduction and representation of contemporary sports culture, as well as its growing dedication and dependence on corporate responsibility to ensure its brand’s integrity. Most of Nike’s recent economic success has been attributed not so much to the quality or price of their footwear and apparel as to the ways in which their advertisements have managed to infuse their brand name and logo with a particular sense of authenticity and urban style (Goldman and Papson, 1999).

In the late 1980’s, the proliferation of ads that associated products with simplistic imagery of individual fulfilment and well being had begun to result in consumer cynicism. Within this media landscape, the ads made by Nike’s main advertising agency Wieder and Kennedy stood out in strong contrast. By presenting the company as first and foremost driven by the desire to promote the love of sports and simultaneously ridiculing the newly worn-out cliché’s of advertising, the Nike brand name and logo gradually came to signify an authentic non-commercialized community of sports lovers (Ibid.).

This strategy, which is still deployed in contemporary Nike ads, often explicitly claims to acknowledge and approve of television viewers’ cynicism towards advertisements and perpetual consumption through ironic and critical depictions and evaluations of consumer culture.
Simultaneously, viewers are hailed as true sports aficionados for whom Nike is the ‘authentic’ representative. The company is thus continually re-presented as supporting in the first place their customers’ authentic practice of sports instead of the exchange of commodities on which it is dependent. For example, Nike occasionally produces ‘inspirational ads’, which avoid promoting any product at all, with the sole aim of enhancing the strength of their brand name. Nike’s ads thus articulate the company’s brand and ‘Swoosh’ logo with authentic (often urban and black) local sports cultures and narratives of individual transcendence and empowerment through the devoted practice of sports. Through these re-presentations of sporting cultures and its hegemonic economic presence, the company’s imagery, philosophy and products have come to take up an increasingly central role in soccer cultures around the world. Nike (and, of course, other sportswear corporations who now engage in similar advertising strategies) can now be said to be intricately connected with the lifestyles and practices in soccer culture and has infused them with its own particular commodified philosophy of life (Goldman and Papson, 1999).

In its advertisements for soccer products and audiences, the above strategy is clearly visible. The ads represent soccer culture either as an unmediated look at authentic communities of urban sports aficionados or as absurd humoristic battles of good over evil by famous soccer players cast in the role of superheroes. In the first, the soccer players are represented as guys from the streets who transcend their surroundings through their devotion to sports and their talent in accord with the ‘just do it’ adage. In the second category of ads, the representations of skills, masculinity and empowerment are parodied, thereby sending the message that Nike, like the viewer, is aware of the constructed nature of the commercial and is ‘on the viewers’ side’.

In one advertisement called ‘the mission’, for example, a team of celebrity players are cast as secret agents that need to steal a soccer ball from a high security building guarded by alien robots. They steal the ball using their soccer skills and in the process destroy the leader of the robots by shooting a soccer ball against his head. During their escape, they blow up the entire building. Ads such as this one combine ironic intertextuality (such as the references in ‘the mission’ to the Hollywood movie ‘mission impossible’) with celebrity soccer stars and impressive soccer moves. As with Nike’s other representations of sports culture, they do not feature any particular commodity, thus giving the impression that Nike is simply expressing its unselfish love of the game.

During the 1990s, however, a number of scandals threatened to tarnish Nike’s carefully built image beyond repair. In 1994, harsh criticisms were published in leading American dailies...
and journals such as the New York Times and Rolling Stone, on Nike’s treatment of workers in Indonesia. In 1996, the company was associated again with the capitalist exploitation when an article in Life Magazine on child labour in Pakistan featured a picture of a 12 year old boy stitching together a Nike soccer ball in a factory. Other scandals followed suit, such as insufficient safety and health standards in Vietnamese factories and, recently, a highly publicized lawsuit in which the company had to defend itself against allegations that their corporate responsibility projects were misleading the public.

For a company who invests so much of its capital in advertising and the infusion of their brand and logo with particular shoe-selling meanings and connotations, such scandals constitute veritable ‘public relations nightmares’ (Locke, 2003). They can (and have) undercut the effects of previous investments in the sign-value of the ‘Swoosh’ (Bennett, 2003, Miller, Lawrence, McKay and Rowe, 2006). Arguably, the Nike brand is even more sensitive to such publicity than brands from its competitors. Its self-representation as the disinterested representative of unmediated love of sports, empowerment and self realization may be especially vulnerable to accusations of cold-hearted capitalist practices and public deceit.

Not so surprisingly, therefore, Nike has been investing strongly in the reputation of their company through corporate responsibility policies over the past 15 years (Locke, 2003). Since 1992, when a code of conduct was issued by Nike to improve working conditions in factories of Asian sub-contractors, the company has gradually expanded its efforts to become, in the words of former CEO Phil Knight, ‘the world’s corporate responsibility leader’ (Nike, 2006b). Apart from improving the conditions and the monitoring of the working conditions in their own factories, Nike also started to develop other projects in their bid for the leading role in the world of corporate responsibility. Amongst the projects that have been developed are, for instance, a large scale project called ‘Nike GO’ that seeks to stimulate ‘the quality and quantity’ of physical activity in American schools through the provision of sports programmes, facilities and funding and ‘Air to Earth’, an environmental education programme (Ibid.).

Nike has also addressed racism in sports in a number of ads. In one ad, Nike addressed the issue of racism in sports using golf star Tiger Woods. The ad stated that there were golf tournaments in which Mr. Woods was not allowed to play because of the colour of his skin. The ad remains controversial after it turned out that these accusations were false (Goldman and Papson, 1999). Nike responded by saying that the claim was meant to be interpreted as symbolizing the discrimination faced by other blacks in less fortunate social circumstances.
Critics, however, have labelled ads like these ‘legitimation advertisements’ because they see their effects first and foremost as increasing the appeal and marketing value of the Nike brand identity rather than in the official corporate responsibility goals (Goldman and Papson, 1999, Rippin, 2003).

**Stand up Speak up**

‘Stand up Speak up’, Nike’s first anti-racist soccer ad, should be placed within the history of ironic advertising and growing dependence on corporate responsibility to ensure brand integrity outlined above. In the rest of this article, the campaign is presented in detail, followed by a discussion of the results of our research outcomes.

‘Racism is one of the biggest problems facing football across Europe. People may think the problem has disappeared, but it hasn’t. The players on the pitch need the help of all fans to help drown out the racists and tell them their actions aren’t acceptable. It’s time to stand up and speak up’ (Thierry Henry, quoted in: Nike, 2006a).

With the above comment, French Arsenal striker Thierry Henry announced the start of ‘Stand up Speak up’, a publicity campaign against soccer racism funded, produced and coordinated by Nike. It was launched in January 2005, and its ad ran for 3 months on television screens in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, France, Spain and Italy. Nike launched a website about the campaign, where the ad can be viewed and some frequently asked questions about the campaign are answered. The company also produced, distributed and sold plastic intertwined black and white wristbands that carried the slogan of the campaign and the Nike Swoosh. The profits made from the wristbands were donated to the King Boudain Foundation, which, at the time of writing, was in the process of distributing the funds to support local anti-racist and pro-diversity initiatives in Europe.

The campaign was held at a time when the media attention for racism in European soccer had grown more or less obsolete, which in part was due to a relative absence of large scale hooligan activities. Despite the fact that ‘people’ might have thought ‘the problem had disappeared’, as Henry put it, the campaign was highly successful at least in economic terms and its appeal to the participants of European soccer culture: Nike managed to sell over 5 million of the black-and-white wristbands to soccer players and fans with a media campaign that lasted only a couple of months. The wristbands became so popular that they repeatedly sold out and are now, at the time of writing, still being offered for sale at often inflated prices on the internet.
The television clip

The 45 second commercial shows a sequence of 15 static shots in which celebrity soccer players are shown asking the viewer to help them combat racism in soccer. Instead of speaking to the viewer, the players remain silent and hold up white cardboards on which their anti-racist message is written. In each shot, one soccer player is shown in a dark studio against the backdrop of a single blue/gray spot of light on a wall, illuminated by a source of light coming from the right hand side of the screen. Each shot features a single soccer player wearing the ‘Stand up Speak up’ wristband, a black t-shirt with Nike’s logo and a pair of blue jeans. The players are filmed from a horizontal angle, facing the camera and making direct eye contact with the viewer. Up until the last two shots, the players are depicted either from head to toes or from the waist up, thus distancing the viewer somewhat, as if to imply a relation between them and the soccer players that is personal but not uncomfortably intimate.

In the first 7 shots of the advertisement, the text on the cardboards celebrates soccer culture and love of the game (i.e. ‘I love football, I love the challenge, I love the sound of the ball hitting the net, the sound of the fans screaming of joy’). While the players are holding up these cards, they are smiling and looking openly into the camera. In the 8th and 9th shots, the mood changes as Thierry Henry holds up a card that reads ‘And yet’. The shot starts with a close up of the cardboard and then the camera pans up to show the upper part of Henry’s body and his head. At first Henry is shot at profile and does not look into the camera but then, as the viewer’s gaze is fixed on him, he rolls his eyes and turns his head to look into the camera from an oblique angle. At this point, he is no longer smiling. However, since his mouth and eyebrows are relaxed as well, he does not seem very emotional either. His nonverbal expressions combine with the anti-racist message of the clip as if to say that racism is demanding his attention but ultimately leaves him cold and thus fails in its intentions.

In the following shot, the unfinished sentence is completed by two additional shots of players holding up cardboards that read ‘...we are still abused for the colour of our skin’. These players have a serious, discontented expression on their face and appear to be upset by the issue they are addressing with their cardboards. The next 5 shots of the advertisement are filled with players holding up the cardboards with the rest of the text (‘We need your voices to drown out the racists. Wherever you hear them, say no’). All these players have a similar serious expression on their face, indicating that the matter at hand should not be taken lightly. In the final two shots of the British version of the ad, the slogan of the campaign is spoken by (black) Thierry Henry and
(white) soccer player Ruud van Nistelrooy. In the first shot, one of the two players is shown as he looks into the camera and says ‘Stand up’. In the second shot, the other player is shown as he says ‘Speak up’ while doing the same. The ad closes with a black screen with a picture of the campaign wristband, the campaign website address and the Nike ‘Swoosh’ logo.

Experiences and evaluations of Stand up Speak up in local Amsterdam
In order to understand the ways in which ‘Stand up Speak up’ was experienced and evaluated, we first conducted a paper and internet survey. A total of 112 respondents filled out the survey. The youngest respondent in our sample was 12 years old and the oldest was 50 with a mean of 26 and a standard deviation of 10.8. White Dutch respondents made up 62% of our sample, 33% indicated they had at least one parent from an immigrant background and 5% neglected to fill out these questions. The two main groups of non-Dutch respondents were of a Surinam ethnicity (10%) and of a Moroccan ethnicity (9%). The remaining 14% of our respondents had an English, Turkish, Colombian, Algerian, Egypt, Hong Kong, Indonesian or South African background. Of the non-Dutch respondents, 50% indicated that they had experienced some form of racist abuse in soccer over the last 2 years. Furthermore, 45% of the respondents were currently playing at a soccer club, while an additional 18% indicated that they had done so in the past. A website was created on which respondents could log on to fill in the survey and emails were sent out to soccer clubs and chat sites in which soccer players were invited to participate. As a means of reward, the respondents entered into a prize draw in which they could win a subscription to a popular soccer magazine.

Table 2. Mean evaluation scores for ‘Stand up, Speak up’.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure</th>
<th>Self-reported effect</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand up, Speak up</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey contained a number of questions on demographics, experiences with soccer racism and three scales that measured the respondents’ exposure, evaluation and self reported change in cognition and behaviour at the soccer grounds attributed to ‘Stand up Speak up’. Items for each of the three scales consisted of a statement with which respondents could indicate their agreement
or disagreement by filling in a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from totally disagree (1) to totally agree (5). The scale measuring exposure to the campaign was made up of 3 items about the frequency and locations in which respondents had been confronted with the campaign and had a reliability coefficient Cronbach’s alpha of .67 (M=3.1; SD=.9). The scale measuring the respondent’s evaluations of the campaign consisted of 3 questions regarding the effects they thought the campaign would have, such as for example ‘I think Stand up Speak up was a good way to fight racism’. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .73 (M=3.3; SD=.8). The third scale measured self reported effects of the campaign in soccer culture, such as for instance whether it had stimulated discussions or raised the awareness of the respondent or his peers about racism. These questions were intended to measure the ways in which the ‘Stand up Speak up’ campaign had made an impact in soccer culture. On the one hand, the campaign had the goal to affect cognitions by raising the awareness of viewers of racist issues in soccer culture. Audiences were expected to have been challenged in their preconceptions about racism and to develop a deeper, more reflexive relation towards racist expressions and processes in their own local soccer cultures. An example of the questions measuring the cognitive component is ‘The campaign ‘Stand up Speak up’ has made me aware of soccer racism at my club’. On the other hand, the campaign aimed at changing behaviour of its audience by enabling the performance of anti-racist activities (Nike, 2006a). This was operationalized with questions about discursive acts related to racism. An example from the questions measuring behavioural change is ‘As a result of the campaign, I have talked to my peers about soccer racism’. This scale was made up of 4 items with a Cronbach’s alpha of .89 (M=2.1; SD=.8).

Of the respondents to our survey, 82% indicated that they had seen the campaign ad on television. Of these respondents, 10% indicated that they wore the black and white wristbands that were promoted in the campaign. Our results showed that 30% of the respondents thought ‘Stand up Speak’ up was a good way to address issues of soccer racism. However, only four percent felt that the campaign had increased their own awareness of the problem of racism and changed the ways in which they interacted with their peers on the soccer grounds. In order to assess which factors predicted the differences found at the individual level, two regression analyses were conducted for self reported change and evaluation of the campaign respectively.
As can be seen in Table 1, the predictor variables explained eight percent of the individual differences in self reported change due to the campaign and seven percent of the differences in the evaluation of the campaign respectively. Apart from variables ‘exposure to the campaign’, only the variable education had a statistically significant influence on self reported change, indicating that the lower the education of a respondent was, the more likely they were to say the campaign had incited reflection or behavioural change amongst them and their peers. However, even in this case the regression weights and standard deviation of the mean scores indicate that this effect did not prevent the self reported change of even the youngest respondents to remain ‘neutral’ at best.

Respondents who wore the wristbands indicated significantly higher self reported effects and evaluation than those that did not wear the wristbands \( (t(112)=-4.212; p<.0005 \text{ and } t(112)=-2.436; p=.016 \text{ for effects and evaluation respectively}) \). However, the absolute scores of these groups indicated that even those who wore the wristbands did not feel that ‘Stand up Speak up’ had challenged their thoughts on racism or stimulated them to behave differently on the football grounds.

As a whole, these results suggest a strong consensus amongst respondents with regards to ‘Stand up Speak up’. The campaign was evaluated and experienced as ineffective by respondents from both Dutch and non-Dutch backgrounds, as well as by respondents who had suffered racist
abuse. The differences between the mean scores for all of these groups were not statistically significant. In short, these factors did not determine the variations in opinions about ‘Stand up Speak up’. Most respondents did not think the campaign had caused a change in cognition or behaviour amongst them and their peers with regards to soccer racism but, interestingly enough, they generally did not evaluate the campaign negatively.

**Visual and discourse analysis of ‘Stand up Speak up’**

One obvious explanation for the relative lack of cognitive and behavioural impact and relatively positive evaluation would have been that ‘Stand up Speak up’ did not run for long enough and therefore did not have lasting effects on local Amsterdam soccer culture. However, the fact that over five million wristbands were sold indicates that this cannot be a sufficient explanation. Moreover, the overwhelming popularity of the wristbands stands in stark contrast with the negative appraisals of our respondents of the effects of the campaign. One important reason for its lack of cognitive and behavioural impact may be that the campaign draws on the common discourse on racism we discussed earlier and reinforces what may be called a ‘myth of the innocent majority’. The following quote from the ‘Stand up Speak up’ website exemplifies this point:

Stand up speak up is a campaign that empowers true football fans to show their opposition to racism. The players can only speak out off the pitch. In the stadiums we need your help to show the ignorant few that their views won’t be tolerated.

*Stand up Speak up* Website (Nike, 2006a).

A distinction is thus made between the ‘true football fans’ and the ‘ignorant few’ whose ‘views’ will not be tolerated. By focusing on the ‘views’ of the ignorant few, an implicit image of ‘the racists’ is generated as a minority group that is united by their adherence of a particular coherent ideological (racist) world ‘view’. This necessarily excludes all the people who occasionally shout racist remarks when they are aroused during the game and participate in the racialization of soccer culture. Needless to say, it also excludes structural racialized inequality that contributes to the reproduction of racism.

This notion of the ‘ignorant few’ with intolerable ‘views’ is identical to the image of the ‘racist hooligan’ described earlier. By taking up this discourse, the campaign thus obscures the
possibility that soccer culture as a whole may be implicated in the reproduction of racism. Moreover, in hailing the viewer as a member of a community of ‘true football fans’, Nike draws on its established authority to define what constitutes the authentic sports loving community. It constructs the ‘true’ soccer lover’s identity as anti-thetical to racism, as if to say that if you really love the game, you couldn’t possibly be ‘a racist’. As a consequence, the campaign plays into and reinforces the common sense conception that all soccer fans that do not identify with a racist ideology belong to an innocent community of ‘true’ soccer fans that are in no way implicated in the reproduction of racism in soccer culture. In so doing, the advertisement divorces the problem of racism from soccer culture altogether.

The visuals of the ‘Stand up Speak up’ campaign also draw on these distinctions and reproduce certain unhelpful assumptions about the nature of racism and its victims and perpetrators. This is evident first of all in the text on the cardboards that the players hold up that constructs racism as discrimination against the depicted players on the basis of their skin colour (‘we are still abused for the colour of our skin’). While this may be true for black players, such a conceptualization creates a unitary racialized category of black victims and hence obscures the differences in racism faced by, for example, Asians or Muslims (Burdsey, 2004a).

Race also structures the visuals of the ad, as all of the depicted players holding up the cards which suggest they are victims of racism are non-white. When the slogan is expressed verbally in the final two shots of the ad, white soccer players appear (in the English version of the ad, for example, the first person to speak in the ad is the white player Ruud van Nistelrooy). The visuals of the commercial therefore combine with its explicit discourse on ‘the racists’ to conflate the category of ‘black’ with that of ‘victim’ and reduce the issue of racism to that of abuse consciously inflicted by a white individual onto a black individual. By using an obvious studio background, moreover, the advertisement visuals carefully avoid any reference to the representations of authentic soccer culture that are found in Nike’s other ads. Racism, or so the implicit message goes, has no place in ‘authentic’ representations of soccer culture and is relegated to the shadows of the artificial studio setting. In this way, racism is conceptually removed from the world of authentic sports culture where the ‘true soccer fans’ are situated.

Consequently, for the majority of viewers, the ad contained little that might have caused them to rethink their own role in the reproduction of soccer racism. Since the common sense understandings in soccer culture also reduce the ‘racism’ to those intentional acts of abuse that can be traced to racist ideologies and hooligan subculture, the average viewer is constructed as
member of an innocent community of ‘true soccer fans’ that has nothing to do with racism. The majority of the viewers already thought of ‘the racist’ as their evil ‘other’ and discounted their own racist jokes, emotional curses and racialized interactions at the soccer club as meaningless and harmless moments of temporary insanity. Their response to the campaign as recorded in our survey supports this interpretation. They agreed with the non-confrontational message of the advertisement, but did not feel that it was a challenge to their own thoughts or behaviour at the soccer grounds.

**Conclusion**

The analysis above should not be taken as an indication that Nike is best left out of the anti-racist struggle altogether. Our criticism of ‘Stand up Speak up’ is focused exclusively on Nike’s use of an unproductive common sense discourse about racism, which does not differ much from some other well intended anti-racist projects (Garland and Rowe, 1999). Instead, for a number of reasons, the case of Nike is illustrative of the potential contributions of corporate actors in anti-racism in soccer. First of all, the huge popularity of Nike’s anti-racist wristbands illustrates the potential of the company’s reputation and brand identity to rally participants behind an anti-racist cause. The (financial) support from 5 million players and sports fans for an anti-racist project is unprecedented in soccer and holds great promises for future anti-racist projects associated with Nike’s brand identity. Second, the campaign testifies to the fact that Nike was willing to articulate their precious yet vulnerable reputation with a discourse of anti-racism. As such, they allowed soccer fans and players, for the first time, to identify with anti-racist ideals through an act of buying and wearing a Nike product. Moreover, it was not the consumptive aspect that reduced its potential to challenge soccer racism but the particular discourse in which it was couched. In fact, in the current political climate in which traditional political identities are increasingly felt to be irrelevant for modern lives, anti-racist actions and statements arranged around consumer lifestyles may well prove to be an increasingly viable strategy (Bennett, 2003). Instead of representing anti-racism as a political ideology that is becoming increasingly at odds with the realities of commodified soccer culture, its insertion into seductive consumerist lifestyles has, in theory, the potential to shape the very subjects of soccer culture and challenge the racialization of (some of) their interactions and parts of the culture. Given Nike’s established authority in re-presenting ‘authentic’ soccer culture and the love of the game, and its central role in the reproduction of contemporary commodified sports culture, the company has unparalleled
access and power over people’s sporting identities and what constitutes a new ‘cool’ and ‘sexy’ soccer culture. Nike is thus in ideal position to provide its soccer audiences with progressive consumerist lifestyles that are articulated with anti-racist ideals, while keeping these seductive enough to displace the pleasures of racialized alternatives.

However, any discussion of the potential benefits of Nike’s corporate responsibility initiatives is incomplete without a healthy measure of scepticism as to the motivations for both corporate responsibility in general and anti-racist projects like ‘Stand up Speak up’ in particular. The obvious reason for this is that Nike remains a multinational corporation, whose first interest is, by definition, making a profit. Any account that suggests that such initiatives are inspired by philanthropic ideals alone is therefore naturally suspect. Nike’s strong reliance on a brand identity that signifies authentic love for sports has made it more vulnerable than other companies to allegations of capitalist exploitation. This might be taken to suggest that its professed mission of becoming a ‘world leader’ in corporate responsibility is not mere lip service. At the same time, the dependency on the particular profitable connotations of their current brand identity is also likely to set limits on the range of anti-racist messages that the company can take up without endangering the sign value of the Swoosh. Some reasons for pessimism in this regard can be gleaned from the company’s response to other demands for changes in its representations of sports culture. For example, the representations of ‘authentic’ sports culture in Nike advertisements have repeatedly been criticized for reproducing particular cultural norms and ideals of masculinity that are in themselves problematic (Cole, 1996, Goldman and Papson, 1999, Rippin, 2003). The slogan ‘Just do it’ and its narratives of individual empowerment through sports have repeatedly been criticized for mystifying the structural and political causes of disadvantage. They are accused of creating the impression that social failure is the result of a lack of discipline and will power of the individual (Goldman and Papson, 1999). Nike’s attempts to address women through advertising also generated criticism for representing femininity in stereotypical domestic and passive terms that complement a tough masculine athlete found in Nikes other advertisements (Cole, 1996, Rippin, 2003). Nike has not responded to any of these allegations with structural changes in their advertisement strategies. Given that these problematic representations of the ‘authentic love of sports’ are simultaneously considered part of the reasons for Nike’s success, it thus seems that to respond to these criticisms and alter their brand identity entails the risk of reducing its popular appeal and hence reducing profits.
Nonetheless, commodified soccer culture is here to stay and presents anti-racism with new challenges and opportunities. The possibilities for concerted actions in areas of shared interest between anti-racist organizations and multinational corporations like Nike therefore need to be explored urgently. The challenge for those working to bring about a more anti-racist soccer culture will be to draw Nike and other similar corporate actors into the anti-racist struggle in constructive and concerted ways while retaining their brand identity or, in a more hopeful scenario, altering it in progressive ways without jeopardizing their own economic survival.

Of course, it needs to be emphasized that mere changes in consumer lifestyles will not be sufficient to challenge soccer racism in all its varieties and locations. Any efforts from corporate actors will have to be supported by local level initiatives and attempts to institutionalise new rules of access, ownership and interaction in soccer culture (Garland and Rowe, 2001). Challenging racialized representations and articulating anti-racist ideals with consumer identities, for instance, are merely two of the many necessary ingredients to a concerted multi-sited anti-racist strategy that addresses all domains of soccer culture. This study has focused exclusively on the reception of the media campaign of ‘Stand up Speak up’ and the 5 million wristbands that Nike managed to sell to soccer fans and players. At the time of writing, the money raised with the sale of the black and white wristbands was being divided amongst local level anti-racist and pro-diversity initiatives. It requires no elaboration that the ways in which these projects will make an impact on soccer culture needs to be assessed well before any sort of assessment may be reached on the impact of the campaign as a whole. The effect of Nike’s commitment to corporate responsibility on soccer culture can therefore, at present, only be answered partially in terms of the reception and effects of its representations. In this respect, the campaign fails to address all of the problem areas we formulated on the basis of empirical and theoretical developments in the field of soccer racism research. However, as we have argued, this should be no reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater just yet. With a little help and dialogue, perhaps, it may yet grow up to be an important ally in the struggle against racism.