

First, read Article 1 and discuss the questions below:

## Article 1

### THE INANITY OF THE STARBUCKS CHRISTMAS CUP 'CONTROVERSY'

(*The Atlantic*, Nov. 10 2015, shortened)

Seeking religious affirmation from corporate branding is ironic, misguided, and culturally damaging.

“Maybe we should boycott Starbucks. I don't know,” Donald Trump said on Monday night at a speech in Springfield, Illinois. “Seriously, I don't care.”

It was a rare moment of trollish apathy for the Donald, considering that he was referring to the kind of peevish campaign that's right up his alley: a video going around the Internet by a guy named Joshua Feuerstein—he calls himself “an American evangelist, internet, and social media personality”—raging against “the age of political correctness” and the new seasonal coffee cups at Starbucks.

“Do you realize that Starbucks wanted to take Christ, and Christmas, off of their brand-new cups? That's why they're just plain red,” he says.

First off, just to be clear, the long-haired, chill-looking person on Starbucks's cups isn't Jesus—she's “a 16th century Norse woodcut of a twin-tailed mermaid, or Siren.” And though Starbucks says it “has told a story of the holidays by featuring symbols of the season from vintage ornaments and hand-drawn reindeer to modern vector-illustrated characters” since 1997, there was never a time when someone could sip a latte out of a nativity-scene-decorated cup.

“Do you realize that Starbucks isn't allowed to say ‘Merry Christmas’ to customers?” Feuerstein continues.

In an email, a Starbucks spokesperson said that the company's baristas “are not provided a script or a policy around greeting customers. They are simply encouraged to create a welcoming environment to delight each person who walks through our doors.” So, no, Feuerstein isn't right—there's no ban on Christmas greetings at Starbucks. That being said, Starbucks is a global company that serves millions of customers per day at over 23,000 stores in 68 countries, including the



United States, which is home to people who celebrate Christmas, Hannukah, Kwanzaa, other holidays, or nothing at all in December. They can't, as a matter of protocol, wish everyone a Merry Christmas. For those who really, really need their barista to wish them a Merry Christmas to find their delight, Feuerstein has a solution: Tell her your name is "Merry Christmas," and then she'll have to say it when she's fixed your hot beverage of choice.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/11/starbucks-coffee-cups-war-on-christmas/415029/>

Some Scandinavian sites that have run the story:

<http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/Arets-rode-julekopper-fra-Starbucks-utloser-kritikk-om-angrep-pa-julen-8235913.html#xtor%3DRSS-3>

<http://www.hegnar.no/okonomi/artikkel570324.ece>

[www.svd.se/usa-rasar-over-ogudaktig-julmugg](http://www.svd.se/usa-rasar-over-ogudaktig-julmugg)

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN CLASS:

- 1) What is the apparent row all about?
- 2) Do you think private companies should be responsible for "religious affirmation"?
- 3) What are the origins of the normal picture on the Starbucks cups?
- 4) Why does Feuerstein suggest that Starbucks employees call themselves "Merry Christmas"?
- 5) What do you think about Starbuck's actions here?
- 6) What does the spreading of this article tell us about the effect of English-language media in the world today?

However, it turns out that this "news item" originated not in the press, but on the internet. Read Article 2 from a website source and discuss the questions below:

#### DAILY SHOW TACKLES 'STUPID' ONLINE OUTRAGE

If your Internet is working – which I assume it is, since you're reading this – you're probably aware of the growing (and totally ridiculous) controversy surrounding Starbucks' new, not-Christmasy-enough holiday cups.

Trevor Noah is certainly aware of it, and like most of us, he thinks the whole thing is utter nonsense.

"The cups are red and green," Noah said on Tuesday's [Daily Show](#). "That's the color of Christmas. They didn't make the cups red and green in honor of stoplights or to remember the time that Kermit got a rash <...>

Noah also did what all those rage-first-ask-questions-never news organizations have failed to do in their coverage of Starbucks' War on Christmas: He pointed out that the whole debacle – which has now become a talking point for Presidential hopeful Donald Trump – was started by an online troll, one who gets fake-angry about a whole number of things, hoping the gullible public will latch onto at least one of his many causes.

Stupid mission accomplished.

(Shortened)

<http://tvline.com/2015/11/11/starbucks-cups-controversy-origin-video-daily-show-report/>

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN CLASS:

- 1) What is the truth behind the Starbucks' Christmas controversy?
- 2) Why does the article end with the words "stupid mission accomplished"?
- 3) What does this say about the effect of media in general?
- 4) Do you think this final part of the story will make it into the Scandinavian press, or has the original story simply had its day? What does this say about the effect of the media, especially English-speaking media?
- 5) What is your opinion of internet trolls?

About the troll in this case:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/11/10/who-is-josh-feuerstein-the-man-behind-the-starbucks-red-cup-frenzy/>