

Why the Sony hack isn't big news in Japan

December 20 2014, by Tomoko A. Hosaka



An exterior of the Sony Pictures Plaza building is seen in Culver City, Calif., Friday, Dec. 19, 2014. While Sony Pictures is technically part of the Sony empire, it has long been run as an entirely separate U.S. company. So far, the Japanese media seems to view the hack as an American problem rather than a domestic one. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

Japan's biggest newspaper, Yomiuri Shimbun, featured a story about Sony Corp. on its website Friday. It wasn't about hacking. It was about the company's struggling tablet business.

Over at newswire Kyodo News, just after the FBI formally blamed North Korea for the cyberattack, mega pop group AKB48 topped headlines online instead.

While American journalists have extensively covered the fallout from the unprecedented Sony hacking attack, it hasn't exactly been massive news in Japan. Stories certainly surfaced after President Barack Obama weighed in on the issue at his year-end press conference Friday. But overall it has received relatively modest attention, mostly in short stories on the inside pages of Japan's major newspapers.

This might all be perplexing to the rest of the world since Sony is one of Japan's most iconic global brands. Here are a few reasons why the story hasn't gotten major play in Japan's mainstream media:

SONY vs SONY PICTURES

While Sony Pictures is technically part of the Sony empire, it has long been run as an entirely separate U.S. company. So far, the Japanese media seems to view the hack as an American problem rather than a domestic one. Indeed, at Sony headquarters itself, officials have refused all comment and referred questions about Sony Pictures to the movie division's headquarters in Culver City, California.

"This is seen mainly as an attack on Hollywood," Damian Thong, a senior analyst at Macquarie Capital Securities in Tokyo, said earlier this week. "I feel they want to clean it up as fast they can and just get on with life."

The studio shelved the Christmas Day release of the North Korea spoof movie "The Interview" after the hackers threatened to attack theaters that showed the film. But for Japan, the movie's demise hardly matters. Sony Pictures never planned to show the film there.



In this Thursday, Dec. 18, 2014 file photo, cars enter and depart from Sony Pictures Entertainment studio lot in Culver City, Calif. While Sony Pictures is technically part of the Sony empire, it has long been run as an entirely separate U.S. company. So far, the Japanese media seems to view the hack as an American problem rather than a domestic one. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

NEWSPAPER DEMOGRAPHICS

Japan's newspapers, which have the highest daily circulations in the world, are inclined to avoid news that is technologically complex. Like hacking. Nobuyuki Hayashi, a veteran freelance tech journalist and consultant based in Tokyo, said the tendency stems from reporters and editors who often don't have a deep understanding of technology. And neither do their aging readers.

"If you are technically savvy and need information (about the Sony hack), you will get it from the Web news media," Hayashi said. "Some technically-savvy people subscribe to a printed newspaper as well, but that's only to read other kinds of news."

OTHER NEWS

It has been a newsy December in Japan, especially with national elections last weekend. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party locked up a solid majority in the lower house and reaffirmed his hold on power for up to four more years. In addition to politics, the national chatter was focused on a big blizzard that hit the northern island of Hokkaido this week, dumping heavy snow, derailing trains and killing several people.

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