

You go, Mecer, just ignore the haters

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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Local is not only 'lekker', it's very much needed. But that doesn't help Vodacom, who gets an Onion for its 'pay to rollover' up-yours to customers.



Screen grab from the ad.

Here are two observations about the current state of humanity, especially as it reveals itself on social media.

1) The “clevers” – the intellectuals, the “lefties”, the “sophisticates” – now have a much broader platform from which to express superiority over the rest of us.

2) Social media – and particularly Twitter – is like a piranha tank. Once they smell blood in the water, the Twitterati will gang up and reduce to tatters whatever subject chosen for ridicule.



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Brendan Seery 28 Aug 2018



This isn't going to make me popular in the advertising fraternity – sadly for them, I don't define my life by what they think of me – but this week I witnessed a feeding frenzy from the great and good in our industry, getting stuck into the latest ad for Mecer, a company which has, since 1987, been assembling computers and other electronic gadgets locally.

The ad “gurus” waded in, remarking that the ad was cheesy; that it was “fake” patriotism, and plain awful. A lot of comments came from those whose agencies have, in recent times, produced work which does a better job than M99. (OK, to explain my own “cleverness”: M99 is a tranquiliser used to knock out animals, some as big as an elephant.)

I saw all the comments and thought: good grief, the ad must be dreadful.

But, it wasn't. Not if you take all the ego-driven criticisms away and look at the spot's purpose.

“ *It was done by the company's staff, from its Midrand factory, and they were all volunteers. And they all looked extremely energetic and joyous almost. With a lot more bounce than those at some ad agencies...* ”

They dance, they sing and they rap (OK, it is a strained set of rhymes, I do admit) and they constantly push the message that Mecer is local. That means local jobs, local investment, local profits.

That sort of patriotic siren call is not popular with many in the post-hippie world, because they have seen the damage that unbridled patriotism – the cleaner, less thuggish cousin of nationalism – has done. Flags and nations are just NOT cool, bru...

But where we are today, as a developing country, we need to reduce, rather than increase, our dependence on foreign brands.

So, my view is that the ad – whether it is cheesy, or even annoying – is making a good, and valuable, marketing point for Mecer. Charity begins at home.

So, Mecer, you get an Orchid from me. Just ignore the haters.

One can be forgiven for thinking that the lunatics are now running the Vodacom asylum, after the cell company blatantly gave the finger this week to its current and potential customers and to the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa).

Icasa regulations stipulating that data bundles can now be rolled over, came into effect last week. But, Icasa erred in not attaching specifics to the regulations. This loophole was wide enough for Vodacom to drive a truck through. Which they

did, by announcing data could be rolled over – but at a further cost.

This outrageous double-billing is unheard of and generated a storm of adverse comment.



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Vodacom then tried to calm things down by saying its new “pricing structure” would substantially lower the price of data and would partially change the “pay to rollover” process.

Gave with one hand and took with the other – it might be good business, Vodacom, but it is shabby customer service. (Even with Vodacom’s “lower” data prices, they were still undercut by other networks.)

As a Vodacom customer, I am furious with the company... and I am not prepared to pay twice for my data.

“ So, this is more than a strawbreaking the camel’s back: it is a shotgun blast to an already crippled animal. Have a look, Vodacom, this is my back, disappearing into the sunset. ”

I won’t be surprised if this cavalier approach – seen as grasping, greedy, and untrustworthy – costs you plenty of customers.

A self-inflicted marketing injury – which this is – is like an own goal in football. Sure, the other team didn’t do it, but that doesn’t change the scoreboard.

Nor does it change the nature of the Onion you get, Vodacom.

ABOUT BRENDAN SEERY

Brendan Seery has been in the news business for most of his life, covering coups, wars, famines - and some funny stories - across Africa. Brendan Seery's *Orchids and Onions* column ran each week in the *Saturday Star* in Johannesburg and the *Weekend Argus* in Cape Town.

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