

Vodacom: we're not having it

 By [Bonnie Ramaila](#)

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It took me a while to make up my mind about Vodacom's 'Surf for Free' ads - it wasn't until I read a 'gossip and chart' report received via some SMS info service, to which my cellphone-geek daughter subscribed me. I don't normally pay attention to the gossip bit, but it turns out that I share the same sentiments as Sir Elton John, but regarding our ad industry lately. [video]

“ British singer Sir Elton John has described today's songwriters as 'pretty awful' and pop music as uninspiring. ”

I am not too sure what is happening to creativity in our ad industry, but the Vodacom "Surf for free" ad - it just doesn't cut it.

First, I find the concept rather too phony and irrelevant (and insensitive) for the offer Vodacom is selling. The concept is around a cruel dictator, Idi Amin (former prime Minister of uganda), who if he were still alive, I'm sure his case would still be continuing in the Hague Court, being convicted for genocide and some atrocities he committed.

Stereotyping not history?

I thought stereotyping Africans in ads was history in the new dispensation of our country, but I guess I was wrong. I know this might sound political, but my point is, what has such a character (or concept) got to do with the service Vodacom is offering? Is there a relation between the service and Idi Amin I'm missing? How did this concept get approved at agency level? Why did client approve it? Two different executions, nogal! Isn't this a waste of money?

To use Sir John's words, the advert is pretty awful, uninspiring and distasteful for me to get up and get the service.

Frankly, I do not even know who the target market is from the advert. The message is clear but I have a problem with how it is conveyed through its execution.

An ad is supposed to be a call to action or informative. Yes, there are ads that are kind of unexpected in the way they sell their product or service, but they never leave you thinking or wondering what a mismatch of the offering and the execution - even if there is a mismatch, it's executed in such a clever and humorous way - it leaves you with a warm, fuzzy feeling that is memorable.

Targeted at students?

I would understand if the ad was targeted at students - who are obviously nocturnal - and like to cross-night or do their assignments in the early hours of the morning when energies are down and there is fewer disturbances (and then sleep in).

I thought TVC concepts (or campaign concepts) are supposed to be relevant to the product/service it's offering and should also have a moderately high likeability rate. Humour is optional. Ads should not be irritating and leaving one frowning and

wondering what the ad was all about.

That I could connect the concept of the Vodacom ad to the movie The Last King of Scotland, for me, its plain laziness and lack of creativity. Yes, movies are supposed to inspire, but creativity is about being inspired to be original, not copy, tweak and paste (or flight in this instance).

We have such great sources of reference from our history and diversity of backgrounds, so what's wrong with being inspired by the diversity of our rich culture in our country?

Inspiration from our own backyard

If only creatives found inspiration from our backyard, not from some Hollywood movies which glorify idiotic behaviour.

Where have all the best creative's gone? John Hunt and Reg Lascaris once espoused the notion of 'life being too short for mediocrity or settle for mediocrity' (can't remember the exact words) and, during those early advertising days, this is when the then up-and-coming creatives learnt and knew that creativity is not supposed to be mediocre. Hence they were consistently good and inspired in what they did.

Now, what is happening to today's creatives? Why are so many of them so uninspired? Why aren't they reading books? Why aren't they researching instead of playing PS4s? What happened to mentors? Or are the mentors uninspired themselves?

"Is this the end of advertising as we know it", or maybe 'the creative ones are not yet born'?!

Note: all the sentences that have double or single inverted commas are not original. They are from various books by cover titles (some of which I tweaked to put a point across): The beautiful ones are not yet born by Chinua Achebe and The end of marketing as we know it by Sergio Zyman. The Gossip and Chart report on Sir Elton John is from the 35050 information subscription service received fortnightly.

ABOUT BONNIE RAMAILA

Bonnie Ramaila is an international communication consultant. She previously worked in the private and public sector as a communication expert. She runs a consultancy that specialises in bespoke communication for niche clients and individuals. Services include communication and media advice, facilitation, publicity and strategy development. She writes in her personal capacity.

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