

Religion and soccer collide in DStv ad, ARB dismisses blasphemy allegations

By  Karabo Ledwaba

1 Mar 2024

The Advertising Regulatory Board (ARB) recently addressed a consumer complaint surrounding a television advertisement promoting the DStv Premiership Soccer League, broadcasted on SuperSport's Channel 200. The ad, featuring a blend of church service and soccer fervor, stirred debate regarding its appropriateness and potential offense to religious sensibilities.



Source: www.unsplash.com

Pivotal moment

In the advertisement, a church setting unfolds, with congregants engaged in various activities while a preacher delivers a sermon. A pivotal moment occurs when a young girl signals for a change, prompting a shift from solemnity to spirited celebration. A male character, reminiscent of soccer coach Steve Komphela, takes the podium, injecting fervent soccer-themed rhetoric into the congregation. The scene culminates in a joyous celebration, echoing the theme of soccer passion filling one's soul.



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The complaint lodged against the advertisement centered on allegations of blasphemy and disrespect towards religious beliefs. However, the advertiser countered by emphasising the contextual nuances. They argued that the portrayal of a church service intertwined with soccer elements aimed to resonate with sports enthusiasts, particularly fans of the DStv Premiership Soccer League.

Context

Key to the advertiser's defense was the contextual framing of the ad, which targeted viewers interested in soccer culture. They highlighted the thematic connection between the church congregation's attire and the Moroka Swallows soccer club,

suggesting an intended resonance with target audiences.

“ In researching, it has found out that there are numerous churches/church goers, who wear their colours to church on certain occasions and that they are as proud of their football allegiance as they are about their culture and religion, where football coaches like Steve Khompela are revered for their ability to inspire fans and players alike. As an example, documentaries such as *Sunderland Till I Die*, have real-life churches praying not just for the health and prosperity of its congregation, but also that of Sunderland Football Club. ”

In its evaluation, the ARB considered the Code's provisions on offensive advertising, scrutinising the advertisement's potential to denigrate religion or religious figures. Ultimately, the ARB concluded that the ad did not cross the Code's stipulations. While acknowledging potential discomfort with the juxtaposition of religion and sport, the ARB interpreted the advertisement as a portrayal of enthusiasm rather than disrespect.

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

Karabo Ledwaba is a Marketing and Media Editor at Bizcommunity and award-winning journalist. Before joining the publication she worked at Sowetan as a content producer and reporter. She was also responsible for the leadership page at SiMag, Sowetan's lifestyle magazine. Contact her at karabo@bizcommunity.com

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