

Bringing authentic Africa to the forefront

By  [Brendan Seery](#)

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One of the many reasons for the xenophobia currently building up across our country is that South Africans' ignorance of Africa is matched only by their arrogance.



As someone who reported from Africa in the turbulent 1980s – and was detained, harassed and deported on various occasions – it never ceased to amaze me how South Africans, both Black and White, view the rest of the continent. For many people here, the world does end at the Limpopo River and the Heart of Darkness begins beyond that.

I remember speaking to an ANC official at a cocktail party in the 1990s, who said he had not “done much travelling in Africa”.

“Where do you think you live?” I responded and got a blank stare. That obvious fact had not occurred to him.



MTN appoints Icasa's outgoing CEO as chief of staff

16 Aug 2022



Those of us who have worked across Africa will know that this amazing continent is much more than coups, wars and famines. Apart from anything else, there is business to be done and money to be made...especially by South African companies.

Every now and again, watching the international news channels on DStv – which have a bigger footprint for the ad breaks than just South Africa – I see an ad aimed at an African audience.

Sometimes it's clear that South Africans are not being targeted, other times when I realise the actual target audience, I can see it would also work here in South Africa.

One such recently was a beautiful MTN commercial, 'This is what your voice can do'. After seeing it on DStv, I went to see if I could find it on YouTube – and I did on both MTN South Sudan and MTN Zambia.

It starts with an old wise woman telling children gathered around her about the power of a voice, which we see snaking its way into a child's ears. Then, in a wonderful sequence, we see a young woman describing a painting for an old, blind, man. It comes alive as she describes it, proving that voice can be the theatre of the mind for some who are visually impaired.

Then we see voices singing and having fun – hearing is also about joy...and joy is infectious as it spreads across the world. Of course, the message is that MTN, as a communications company, is what gives the real power to your voice, enabling it to cross countries, continents and the globe.

The ad is put together artistically and in a way which doesn't talk down to its audience. And it gets the point across eloquently.

Orchids to MTN and its African operations. If we had more brands and commercials like this, maybe we could break down the artificial walls between the people of Africa.

Roadkill on the Twitter timeline

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Many brands are playing Russian roulette by leaving their social media operations in the hands of people who just don't get reputation damage.

The Democratic Alliance needs to have a re-think of its social media management after this week's self-inflicted reputation injury initiated by party leader John Steenhuisen.

Steenhuisen – who has a reputation for blocking people on Twitter who dare criticise him – was on what is billed as the country’s most popular podcast, hosted by MacG. On a previous podcast, MacG opined that it was perhaps time the DA was “given a chance” to run South Africa. Quite correctly, someone in the DA PR machine spotted a great PR opportunity for Steenhuisen to go on air, unscripted and relaxed and dispel many of the stereotypes about the party.

So far, so good. But, in his efforts to appear the “ordinary oke”, Steenhuisen went overboard. Asked if he knew what “roadkill” meant, he said “It sounds like my ex-wife...”

The presenters fell off their chairs in amusement, as men would. After all, we’ve been making jokes about women for millennia, boet, so why stop now?

To make a comment like this in women’s month, when it is becoming increasingly obvious that this jokey type of atmosphere is what allows sexism (and its nasty cousin, gender-based violence) to thrive, is, frankly, insane.

“ 📱📱 On [@MacGUnleashed](#), it's [@jsteehuisen](#) like you've never seen him before! Grab a drink and join John for some podcast and chill. Tune in today at 15h00: <https://t.co/578tk1PE5u>Danko! pic.twitter.com/phZWylkXsc
— Democratic Alliance (@Our_DA) [August 18, 2022](#) ”

What makes it all the more regrettable is that Steenhuisen went on to have a great interview, showing that he is truly one of the best political speakers and a natural in front of a mike. He also made concessions – about white privilege and racism – which may have made some of his White supporters irritated but which was expertly aimed at that huge Black majority out there which is increasingly disenchanted with politics.

But, why, oh why, did the DA’s social media “clevers” decide to punt the interview as though it was on the same level as an invite to strip club? Grab a drink, boet, sit down and enjoy the show (including the jokes – sheesh chicks must have a sense of humour, dude...)

How did that decision get past the party higher-ups? Perhaps because they didn’t see anything offensive in a man disparaging the mother of his two children – a man who played the major role in ending the marriage. If anybody was relationship roadkill, it was him.

I expect I will get lots of hate mail from DA supporters for this. And frankly, if I do, it says more about them than it does about me. If we do not call out these sorts of sexist jokes from friends and family – and national figures – every time we hear them, then our women will continue to live their lives in a hostile environment.

More than that, though, this was a marketing decision which ended up damaging the DA brand and generated unnecessary controversy. So it gets an Onion from me. I suppose that would make me “roadkill” in John’s eyes...

To see the full podcast episode, go [here](#).

Got anything you'd like to say or got any great work I may not know about? Drop me a line at brendanjsery@gmail.com

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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