

Audi mum on 'illegal' ad

By  Brendan Seery

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Affronted: Some road users deem distracting billboard a hazard.



The Audi ad.

It is a pity I was busy and couldn't make a discussion session with Audi South Africa and its agency, Ogilvy, this week. Because they probably would have thrown me out for calling "bulls#it" at least once.

That's a shame, not only because I love Audi's cars, but have given many Orchids to the advertising produced in SA for the brand by Ogilvy.

“ Knowing in advance that I will be categorised as an old, insensitive technophobe, I found the Audi invitation to be everything which is wrong with marketing globally these days. ”

Firstly, it went down the same old hackneyed path that “millennials are the future” and care deeply about everything. To wit, “we see their view points on global issues propelling brands to take a more purposeful approach to marketing”.

The idea is that millennials love – and will buy – brands which “care” and want to make a difference to the planet. Rubbish!

Firstly, millennials are at the beginning of their work and family lives and don't have the money to spend on premium, elegant products like Audis.



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The people who do – those over 50, who account for more than half of vehicle purchase decisions globally – are ignored by the marketing lemming promoting the youth demographic.

Ad agencies are now forcing out people in their early- to mid-30s, because they're "over the hill".

But, here's the real kicker. Audi was accused this week of having an illegal billboard at a major intersection in Johannesburg... possibly becoming a road safety hazard because of its size and distraction value.

Audi wasn't the only brand blasted this week but, in common with the others, its social media team (quite vocal in lots of other ways) decided to remain silent.

“ Activists say as much as 90% of the outdoor advertising in Johannesburg is illegal in terms of not only the city's bylaws, but the National Roads Act, which strictly define where billboards may appear, for road safety reasons. ”

Even when the city takes action against the criminality, the outdoor companies run to the courts and tangle the process up in legal red tape.



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And, in some cases, the city itself may have been giving permission for structures which are illegal, like those in the median on dual carriageways. Joburg residents have had enough.

And, because they know it is pointless trying to get the outdoor companies to do anything, they are using social media to name and shame.

So, just as much as Audi and the rest of the Volkswagen group suffered huge reputation damage when it emerged they were cheating on emissions data globally, so, too, do these brands risk damaging their images by being seen to be accomplices to criminality.



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What if your billboard at the intersection, Audi, results in a crash and deaths? What was the purpose, then? What if someone runs over a child while driving because they were trying to read an illegal marketing board close to a school?

Activists say all of the trailer-mounted ad hoardings and many of those on the sides of building in close proximity to roads are illegal.

Because the authorities are doing nothing, a backlash is building: already a number of advertising trailers have been vandalised.

It will be interesting to see how a court case for malicious damage to property turns out if a defendant argues that he or she was not damaging property, merely stopping the commission of a crime.

So, all you brands who are involved in this, don't push the blame elsewhere. If your brand is being marketed illegally, you're going to feel the consequences.

That illegality and those consequences are the epitome of bad marketing, so you will get Onions.



Snapshots of some of the ads in question.

The photos here come from a number of spots around the city.

I am not saying they are all illegal, but they certainly should be investigated. The trailers should be removed, too.

Finally, the other Onion this week (sorry, nothing good enough for an Orchid) goes to me, for getting things wrong in last week's column.



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Nahana Communications Group 1 Oct 2019



The clever idea for "bouquets for bros" being run by NetFlorist was conceptualised by HelloFCB+.

Sorry, people. Here's your delayed Orchid!

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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