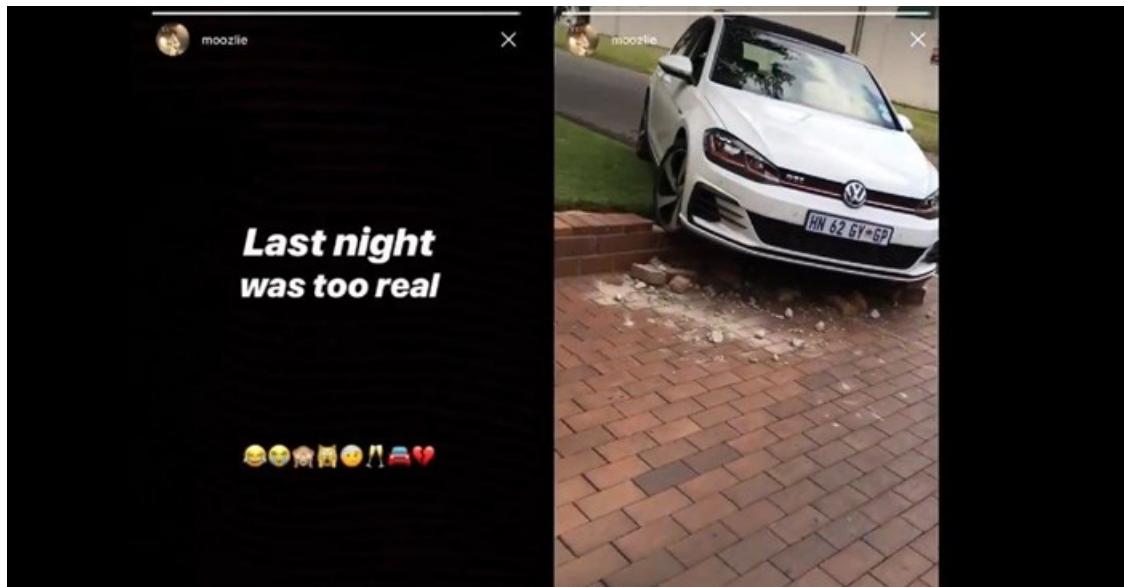


# Up close and personal - Are shock ads effective?

By Zubeida Goolam

29 Jan 2019

A video of rapper and presenter, Nomuzi Mabena, recently went viral after she was seemingly involved in a car accident while driving and recording herself on Instagram Live. 14 hours later, it was revealed that the accident was in fact a drunk-driving awareness campaign in partnership with Volkswagen's #VWDriveDry initiative.



Screengrab from [video](#) on Nomuzi Mabena's Twitter account.

What was meant to trigger drivers into reconsidering their habits, quickly turned into defamatory attacks on Mabena and prompted the hashtag "#RoastNomuzi". The campaign has been met with mixed reactions on social media, with the majority labelling the publicity stunt as "distasteful". This then prompts a question around shock ads, or as marketers say, "shockvertising". How far is too far? Are shock ads effective in changing consumer behaviour or, is shocking people simply off-putting?

**“** I partnered with [@Volkswagen](#) and [@DriveDry](#) to make a change in 2019. We don't want to see another year where thousands of lives are lost on our roads because of drinking & driving.

Take the pledge and make the change to [#VWDriveDry](#) in 2019. [#Nomuzihttps://t.co/HsxMIBjQr](https://t.co/HsxMIBjQr)— #MoozieVictory   
(@NoMoozie) [January 11, 2019](#) **”**

**“** Some have shared their outrage. Some have shared their support. But who will share their pledge? 300 000 people saw these posts but only 4 people commented on reckless driving. Take the pledge [#VWDriveDry](#) [pic.twitter.com/NOHvNy9Rij](http://pic.twitter.com/NOHvNy9Rij)— Drive Dry (@DriveDry) [January 14, 2019](#) **”**

**“** There is really no need [#RoastNomuzi](#) . Texting and driving is never a good idea. Many lives have been lost through texting and driving. [#DriveDry](#)  
Read the article to get the depth of this campaign [#VWDriveDry](#) <https://t.co/iUCWpM2qtR>— Pat Mahlangu  
(@iam\_thokozani1) [January 11, 2019](#) **”**

In the digital era, we are constantly flooded with marketing messages, as brands fight over a piece of the pie. However, the campaigns that often do catch our eye are the ones that provoke controversy and deliberately violate our expectations. So, in a bid to raise eyebrows, brands use shock tactics to turn heads or call out irresponsible behaviour.

However people have become increasingly desensitised to ads that try to vilify them for their behaviour, there are limitations

when it comes to implementing the shock factor. Rather than road safety ads showing a gruesome car crash, or anti-smoking campaigns plastered with grotesque images of lung cancer, marketers have adopted a different approach, highlighting the emotional consequences of bad habits on ourselves and our loved ones. This is what #VWDriveDry aimed to achieve with its campaign. The question is, did it work?

“ People just don't want to face the truth that texting or using your phone while driving is dangerous not only for them but also for other innocent people in the road who comply with rules of the road. People will always shun the truth! I support Drive Dry Campaign @NoMoozie <https://t.co/qPIGpAsZe6>— Black Twittezen II (@DaRealNkosana) [January 14, 2019](#) ”

“ #VWDriveDry #Nomuzi all I can say is that Am impressed and alerted at once,. I must say; someone had to do this, And im glad you overcame your "fear" and stand in the gab.. Drinking and texting while driving is a serious issue, and you just took a good care of it ↗ <https://t.co/7iQ1Azsg6T>— nhlamulo\_nhlaks (@NhlaksNhlamulo) [January 12, 2019](#) ”

“ The irony of people saying "you can't play around with death" THAT'S THE POINT, STOP DRINKING AND DRIVING #VWDriveDry— Hashirama Senju88 (@RUdebOyrEd) [January 11, 2019](#) ”

A successful, controversial marketing campaign should anticipate the public's reactions from all angles before it's implemented. Take for example Nike's 2018 #FairnessFirst campaign with Colin Kaepernick, Serena Williams, and Caster Semenya. These athletes all faced discrimination in their careers. Nike took some of sport's most celebrated and contested players to showcase the power of the underdog.



### #FairnessFirst: How Nike inspires others to 'just do it' with commodity activism

Leigh Andrews 17 Sep 2018



Although Nike was heading into dangerous territory, given the public outrage that someone like Kaepernick faced for his political stance against police brutality in the US, and given Nike's own history regarding unethical labour practices, it generated talkability. Talkability is certainly one of the most important elements of campaigns our agency, BrandTruth Integrated Content Practice, practice every day.

One thing is for sure, Volkswagen and its Drive Dry campaign could not have predicted that the narrative would shift from awareness around driving drunk, to a character and career assassination of Nomuzi Mabena. But this is a high-risk factor that comes with using shock tactics.

### #VWDriveDry: Take home lessons

Sheila Afari 22 Jan 2019





With the devastating road fatalities in South Africa – many caused by drunk drivers – one cannot deny the importance of such a campaign. However, the outcome became more about the tactics rather than the actual call to action: to stop irresponsible driving.

So why did Nomuzi Mabena and #VWDriveDry garner such public criticism? Firstly, consumers should never feel misled, regardless of how strong and necessary the messaging is. Taking 14 hours to notify the public that the video was, in fact, an awareness campaign, was perhaps too long. Its intentions should have been made clear. Although the use of “shockvertising” in this campaign did achieve traditional PR goals of AVE and social media hits, did it encourage people to reconsider their driving habits?



## Deception is the lowest form of marketing

Nick Grubb 16 Jan 2019



Only time will tell when annual road accident statistics are released. But the fact remains, brands cannot afford to underestimate the intelligence of its audience. This is where “commodity activism” comes in. Notable brands such as Nike, Gillette, Nando’s and Castle Lager, are popularly known for social commentary in their campaigns. The simple difference between these brands and the #VWDriveDry campaign is that the latter’s intentions were not clear.

“Shockvertising” does indeed bring the issues that people don’t want to talk about directly into the public domain. However, how brands relay the message is important now more than ever, particularly when consumer behaviour merges with social responsibility. Individual consumers purchase brands that share similar interests and values. Not all activism can be commodified.

## ABOUT ZUBEIDA GOOLAM

With a rich history and culture, Zubeida had an impressive repertoire, spanning over many years at industry giants, before starting and then dominating with her own company Valiant. Valiant incorporates multiple levels of marketing including but not limited to consulting, social media, storytelling and full content creation. With years of experience and a passion for creating, Zubeida now heads up the storytelling team along with co-founder Wayne Flemming, creating online campaigns that both inspire and drive critical engagement.

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