

Are we getting too politically direct? (Or have we just lost our sense of humour?)

By [Orestis Patricios](#), issued by [Ornico](#)

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The South African advertising community has enjoyed a long history of satire and poking fun at local stereotypes in a very tongue-in-cheek fashion, so it came as quite a surprise to read the brouhaha about the Romans Pizza 'Boeriezza' advert.

The storm in a pizza pan started when a complaint was lodged with the Advertising Standards Authority which declared that the April newcomer advert for Romans Pizza's new boerewors pizza "was an attack on white Afrikaans women". Beeld reported that the complainant also said that the advert in question depicted Afrikaners as "backward" and "obsessed with sex".

[The advert](#) - which was picked up by Ornico's Newcomer service and has been saved in our advertising library - can be viewed at [Ornico's YouTube.com channel](#). When you look at the ad, what is immediately apparent is how funny it is, and how similar it is to any number of ads that parody local social archetypes or types.

A good case in point is the [series of adverts made by BP](#) to promote the now beleaguered energy company's sponsorship of the 2010 Fifa World Cup that kicks off in South Africa this week. This campaign relies heavily on humour and stereotypes to portray local factions that are brought together by football and the love of the game. The stereotypes in the commercials that face off for football matches include the car guards vs. the "boytijes" vs.; the café owners vs. the "mamas"; and the divas vs. the taxi drivers.

Although the humour in the BP ads is a lot more understated, the mama's; café owners; Greek community or taxi drivers could easily have laid complaints with the ASA if they suffered from a major sense of humour failure about this series of ads.

Closer to home with a play on the 'wors' theme is the [Vodacom "Player 23" advert featuring Robbie "Leeuloop" Wessels](#) singing "a story about two 'manne' from different provincial spanne, they often did compete to be the main 'bok' on the street." He goes on to sing: "They eyed each other skeef to see who's the biggest fan, they checked each other's boerewors to see who is the man."

What the Romans Pizza pulled ad, and the Vodacom Wessels ad clearly have in common is a pun on boerewors. Because of this it could be easy for a rugby fan to get upset and lay a complaint against Vodacom at the ASA saying that this ad was "an attack on rugby fans" and that the commercial portrays rugby fans as "obsessed with sex". I mean there was a double entendre on boerewors in this advert, was there not?

This suggestion points out how ridiculous the suggestion is, and what a stretch the complainant's assertion is. Yes the Romans Pizza ad was a case of typecasting blondes, but if we had to remove every ad stereotyping women and blondes we'd possibly wipe out some 70% of advertising as we know it, if not more.

The advert is largely innocuous and as [Herman Manson of Marklives!com says](#), if it is guilty of anything it is that the advert is poorly conceived and executed. Unlike the BP and Vodacom ads, why the Romans Pizza commercial fails is because it largely laughs at the stereotype than laughing with it. The Vodacom and BP adverts were inclusive and because of this they largely create strong emotions of warmth and community.

However is the Romans Pizza an "attack on white Afrikaans women"? I think not. The commentary from the complainant speaks to Afrikaans women being marginalized, humourless and insecure. The fact that the complaint was lodged by a man could also be viewed as patronizing - can't Afrikaans women speak for themselves?

Besides the dumb blonde Afrikaans stereotype was perfected some years ago by [Dowwe Dolla](#) who showed that to pull off this archetype successfully you actually had to be smart. Very very smart. Check her out in full parody flight remaking Robbie Wessel's "Leeuwoop" into "[Kameeltoon](#)" and you'll see exactly what I mean.

There are two lessons to be learned from the Romans Pizza ad. The first is that perhaps we're just getting a little too politically correct and humourless, and if we carry down this path cutting the edges of freedom of speech advertising and our collective funny bone will suffer something terribly.

The other lesson is that if you're going to try and make people laugh using stereotypes you have to be smart and inclusive. Getting people to laugh at themselves is perhaps the greatest advertising victory you can score.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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