

Take home lessons

 By [Sheila Afari](#)

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On Thursday, 10 January 2019, Twitter went into a frenzy over what appeared to be Nomuzi "Moozlie" Mabena in a car crash captured on InstaLive.



Nomuzi Mabena

I was one of the many people that stayed up till late waiting to hear a positive update on the well-being of Moozlie and also struggled to sleep because of the traumatising visuals I had seen. I wanted to tweet: "NO ONE WATCH THAT VIDEO!" It's not something I could watch again and would rather not have watched it. It was definitely a video that needed some sensitising beforehand.

Nevertheless, with the speculation that it was a campaign video for road safety, I thought ok, that was damn impactful. No one is going to touch their phone whilst driving ever again! Only to find out that it was a don't drink and drive campaign?



#VWDriveDry: Encouraging South Africans to drive responsibly

15 Jan 2019



Here are some reasons why I think the #VWDriveDry campaign was a fail and some take home lessons...

Response time

I can imagine that no one had anticipated that Moozlie's video would have gone viral so quickly as well as caused a storm on social media that it may have seemed appropriate in planning to only shed light on the campaign in the afternoon the day after. However, this in my opinion was the biggest contributor to the campaign being "botched" as some media outlets have reported.

If you're embarking on a digital campaign late at night, I'm assuming someone from brand/agency was monitoring the social media reaction. It's hard to believe that a brand representative and Moozlie were not in studio at a TV news outlet at 6am to confirm that Moozlie was alright and announce the campaign after the backlash received within two hours of the video release.

Twitter investigators had already deduced that the video was "fake" and public sentiments around shock and pledging to never drive and use their phones again, went from sympathy to outrage with all negative reactions aimed at Moozlie as she was the "face" and no other brand association to connect the so called "fake" video to.

Those who didn't believe the video was fake and were waiting on confirmation of Moozlie's well-being eventually became exhausted and succumbed to the notion that this was a campaign, as surely by morning if this was real some news would have come out. So the impact that the video had on this group too eventually was lost as other emotions of frustration and deceit took over.

Timing was everything for the success of this campaign and their failure to quickly take ownership of the campaign closed the window of opportunity to ride on people's emotions to not be reckless whilst driving.

What was highly embarrassing was how quickly all the other road safety-related brands distanced themselves from this video in light of the public sentiment.

Campaign message

After keeping the country in suspense for more than half a day, Volkswagen and Drive Dry came forward to announce the campaign. They highlighted that it was not their intention to distress anyone. Although I think the emotional response was what they were going for to make the video impactful and make people change their ways. Something different was needed to send a message and they actually got this right. They just took too long to get people out of their distress.

What really surprised me was that they announced the campaign as a 'don't drink and drive' initiative. "We don't want to see another year where thousands of lives are lost on our roads because of drinking and driving," shared the various campaign partners. In later media reports, the inclusion of not using one's phone whilst driving was mentioned by brand reps but it doesn't seem like this was meant to be the core messaging of the campaign, yet the phone message was the take-home message by the majority.

When the video was first released, some Twitter users highlighted that Moozlie had been drinking prior, however, most highlighted it as a problem she'll face with insurance, etc. and very few saw it as *the* cause or contributor to her accident. In the same breath, very few people publicly declared not to drink and drive but A LOT of people vowed to never use their phones whilst driving again.

“ The video was impactful, but it was off the mark with its messaging, so it cannot be said to have been successful. Yes, this campaign may have a positive contribution to eliminating some of the factors that cause accidents, such as being on one's phone, but if your business is about beef and people leave with a chicken message, you can't say you ran a successful campaign because chicken is also in the protein food group. ”

I went through the campaign video about how the campaign started long before we realised, which detailed Moozlie seemingly drinking and driving through the festive season. I never came across that footage before this campaign video and I highly doubt many people who saw those posts over the holiday season connected it to the car crash video. This new revealed element of the campaign waters the campaign down for me further. It's more impactful for people to see someone do something once and get affected than continuously see them do it and nothing happens because the latter is where most people sit. They've driven after drinking so many times and have never been in an accident, that they believe it doesn't affect them, that they have their wits about them. I get the concept and what they were trying to convey, but I feel it wasn't well put together for the message they were trying to convey.



Deception is the lowest form of marketing

Nick Grubb 16 Jan 2019



'Roast Moozlie'

When you think it couldn't get any worse, the influencer partner of the campaign gets roasted. Forget the contents of the roast, the fact that things got this far with a paid influencer, I believe is a direct result of the slow response time that the brands took to come forward and own the campaign.

Moozlie was the face for the campaign for hours. People were not happy. She was the only visible target for too long that when Volkswagen and Drive Dry came to the forefront, no one cared. I believe the brands should have released a public apology to Moozlie for not managing the negative effects of the campaign well. It doesn't matter what the contractual arrangements were, or how much she got paid, things didn't go according to plan, and the agency didn't react fast enough. The sentiments of the roast on the other hand is another conversation that Moozlie and her team need to deal with internally.

Food for thought

Small agency vs corporate

I haven't done research to see what agencies were involved in this campaign, so my thinking here could be completely off mark, but it makes me think perhaps this was a corporate project which could explain the delay in response times to everything. Maybe at midnight someone in the campaign chain realised things were going south, but if your campaign announcement is at 2pm the following day, that timeline might even be quicker than trying to get sign offs from the right people to make the announcement earlier.

As a small agency and working with other small agencies, I see a huge difference with the turnaround of certain things than when working with corporate. Both come with their strengths and perhaps there needs to be more collaboration between corporate and small agencies. You need to have an agency in your corner that can actually get a call at 4am in the morning and have a 6am interview lined up for a crisis without red tape of having budget approval for an interview that wasn't planned because the campaign is just digital.

When dealing with influencers, you need to involve agencies that regularly work with influencers and that understand how plans change and adapt quickly. It's the nature of dealing with people vs companies and products.

Lack of crisis management culture / reactive crisis management culture

There's very little crisis management that gets done in South Africa (outside of corporate SA). People might attribute this to the country being a very forgiving nation, but often there are gaps to come out and apologise or make corrections before things get worse, but people would rather chance the outcome because even if they find themselves in hot water, people will

quickly move onto another topic the next day. In the event that the hot water situation still sticks, people seek out crisis management, but now the problem is being tackled from a reactive approach whereas a better outcome could have been had if a proactive approach was taken.

The #VWDriveDry campaign managers should have come out earlier to apologise and save face for the campaign whilst people were still ready to take the call to action from the campaign, but I suspect it was an enticing option to play the waiting game in case things turned around or didn't get worse.

The other side of the coin for the lack of crisis management culture in SA is that a lot of people in crisis don't realise that they are in crisis.

Take home lessons

- Response time can make or break a campaign. When running a viral campaign, it's important to be on standby to react accordingly.
- No matter how great your campaign is and how much effort went into it to garner the reaction you wanted, if your campaign is not on mark with messaging, you have failed at a key objective.
- 'Roast Moozlie' leaves an opportunity for Moozlie to capitalise on all the publicity received. She must use the window that's open to attract new engagers to her brand. With regards to a long-term window, an official 'Roast Moozlie' event could show that she was able to take the negativity as a good sportsman and milk the publicity further and hopefully get paid for it this time.

ABOUT SHEILA AFARI

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