

# The Ban-Ban Club: the rise of banned advertising

 By [Estelle Nagel](#)

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Earlier this week we saw the banning of yet another controversial advertisement poking fun at the president. I can't say that I think it's a bad thing.

If I am completely honest, I don't watch much television and the only advertising that really reaches me comes via social media. In fact, I would be hard-pressed to mention my favourite commercial of the year. However, I've seen the Jacob Zuma Nkandla Fish and Chips Co ad. I've seen it on my family and friends' Facebook walls, and on Twitter, and on online news sites and in the paper. Come to think of it, I've also seen the "Last Dictator" ad of Nando's that had been banned. And the Red Bull "Jesus walks on water" ad. In fact, I've seen and really taken note of every single banned ad that came out this year.

The Fish and Chips advert, in my opinion, isn't the most brilliant piece of work we've seen this year. I don't think it's particularly clever, or well-animated, and the punchline was fairly obvious. ("Even Pravin will approve!") Had it not been banned, I doubt it would have been as share-worthy as it is at the present.

It seems that there is nothing better for an advertisement than to *be* banned. Seeing as how most of the country is avidly opposed to laws restricting media freedom, we are more than likely to support the offending party in droves to spite "The Man", the hipster version of picketing Parliament.

The brand seemed to relish the controversy, uploading its video to YouTube within hours of receiving word from the SABC as "the ad the SABC refuses to air". I've also seen the resulting propaganda from fans, to the tune of "share it on Facebook! Let it be spread through the country! Please press the like button!"

## 150,000 collective views

Two uploads on YouTube resulted in a respectable 150,000 collective views, and counting - not to mention the stream of social media activity that followed. You couldn't wish for more attention.

But before we get on our high horse in defence of freedom of speech, I can't help but wonder if the company wasn't gunning for a seat in the ban-ban club from the word go. After all, right after the Blade Nzimande requested a ban on making fun of the president, and lambasted the public for, as he put it, favouring only Afrikaners and Jews, these mysteriously offensive ads began cropping up.

First of all, everyone who's seen Kate Middleton's blurry honeymoon snaps knows that banning ANYTHING is simply not

possible. Despite her winning the court case, we've all seen the Duchess topless twice and probably made a meme of it. (Ditto Prince Harry). Secondly, the SABC denies that the ad was "banned" and claims it was only being investigated. I suppose it's a little saucier to refer to something as banned than saying SABC tapped us on the wrist for handing in the ad late or not following their guidelines, as reports have stated.

All offensive ads are deliberately trying to provoke a reaction - Red Bull from Christians, Nando's from...everyone. Perhaps there are more people hoping to be banned than previously suspected.

But there is a fine line. Satire is a gift that not everyone has and there are some rules to bear in mind before sending a controversial ad out into the world.

- **Pick your platform**

Not every platform is going to be suited to controversy. The internet is a great medium for poking fun at holy cows because it's the home of The-Pope-is-the-Evil-Emperor-from-Star-Wars memes and entire websites dedicated the weird and wacky. The Sunday newspaper crowd might be less forgiving.

- **Be genuinely clever**

Nando's has mastered the art of poking fun and promoting chicken, because it's genuinely *clever*. That's the subtle difference between drawing a picture of Jacob Zuma sitting in his mansion with dozens of screaming children running around the dinner table and presenting Helen Zille with an award for being the "mother of all cock-ups". One is stating the obvious and desperately begging us to laugh at it, whereas the other is tongue-in-cheek and a great PR stunt. Give the public some credit. They won't forward your lame jokes forever - but your clever ones will become the stuff of legend.

- **Don't be controversial for controversy's sake**

I don't encourage anyone to be deliberately controversial. After all, they have shareholders, they have clients, they have to sell a product and being known as the company who broadcast a YouTube commercial of the prophet Mohammed eating protein bars will not go a long way in building brand confidence.

- **Pick your battles**

Believe it or not, there are still holy cows. The *Onion* newspaper in the UK pushed things too far when it published a picture of an aeroplane flying into the Willis Tower. The GPS system that Gareth Cliff had been punting on 5FM also made a faux pas when they chose to poke fun at his speeding tickets, saying that if "had our system in his car, he wouldn't have had to speed". Cliff was less than amused, and it reflected in his endorsement of the product. Lesson learnt: don't bite the hand that feeds you and don't force a joke. Let's face it, the Cliff scandal had blown over months ago - along with the opportunity to joke about it.

Banning is a branding exercise that is going to be around for a number of years. Let's appreciate the boldness of these advertisers and if you do decide to emulate them, at least do it well.

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- Bizcommunity: [Out of creative ideas?](#), 28 November 2012
- Bizcommunity: [SABC expresses concern about "ad ban" claims](#), 28 November 2012

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