

Carling Black Label's Mother's Day ad challenges traditional masculinity

It looks to me as though the hard-headed bean counters at Carling Black Label either took the day off when came decision time for the brand's latest ad ... or they were deliberately excluded

 By [Brendan Seery](#) 12 May 2025



Touchy feely

Because, in the harsh light of day, the number-crunchers – and maybe a hardcore salesperson or two – could have come up with some solid arguments about why the ad should not have been made and why, in strict bottom-line terms, it could turn out to be a waste of money.

After all, what business has a beer brand – one of the ultimate symbols of machismo – got getting all touchy feely with a Mother's Day spot? How on earth will this persuade the guys to buy more Carling Black Label?

The way advertising has been going over the last five years, where budgets have been crimped and

everyone involved in marketing is being squeezed to go down the retail/call-to-action road to push volume: this work stands out because it is so blindingly irrelevant – and irreverent at the same time.

But it is so well done that it enralls the viewer as it pays tribute to the unsung heroes of our society – our mothers.

The two mothers – Beulah Shabalala, mother of Mduduzi Shabalala and Phumzile Mbatha, mother of Thabane Mbatha – happen to have sons who are star footballers, and they both find it impossible not to let their pride in their offspring shine through. At the same time they're in front of the camera, their sons – Thabane Mbatha of Orlando Pirates and Mduduzi Shabalala of Kaizer Chiefs are watching the videos.

I am your hope

They laugh, they smile and then, in a moment of pure emotion, the tough Mbatha cannot suppress a tear which rolls down his face as his mother recounts how he used to sing to her “I am your hope.”

Both the soccer heroes then burst in to their childhood homes, surprising their moms. It's natural because it's real.

And therein lies the bit of social work being done here by Carling Black Label. This ad may not be about beer, but it is all about respect and remembering the people who made you a champion... the champion mothers.



#ORCHIDSANDONIONS

#OrchidsandOnions: Corion Capital's *Star Wars* surprise, while Wired misses the PR brief

Brendan Seery 5 May 2025

That's a bit of subtle nation-building right there. Will it sell more beer? Who knows? Maybe not. But it does burnish the name of Carling as a brand which cares and one which tells the macho guys: hey, it's OK to show a bit of love.

Kerryn Greenleaf, brand director for Carling Black Label, says: “We live in a country where mothers are the first teachers, the first believers, the first protectors. This campaign isn't about football glory, it's about the unseen work of mothering, and the words that keep us going long after we leave home.”

Spot on.

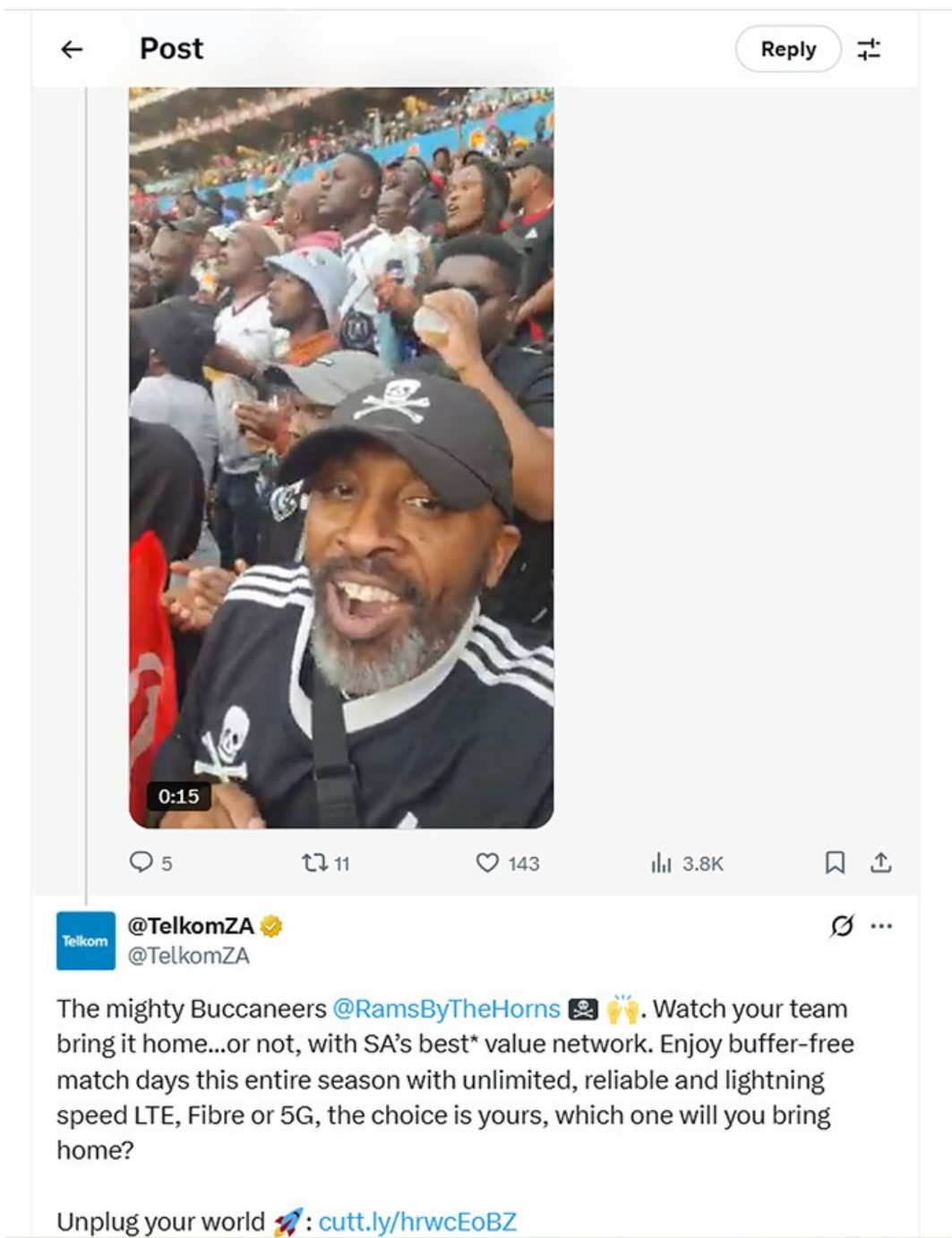
Orchids for everyone involved at Carling Black and also to retroviral, whose boss man, Mike Sharman, has an unerring eye for identifying and capturing emotion without it ever becoming cheesy.

One of the aspects about the Carling Black Label campaign around Mother's Day is the way it used social media to get people to speak about their mothers. Obviously, there were prizes at stake, but just from a brief look at some of the responses, I was filled with a lot more confidence in our young people – and especially young men, who can start making us into a more caring nation. That's about more than just beer...

Doing more harm

Social media can be a great place for marketing – although, frankly, I am concerned that its intrusive nature

as well as the seeming lack of etiquette of some of those charged with handling social media comms for brands, can do more harm than good.



Case in point: This week, when fans were winding up the banter, ahead of the Nedbank Cup final, which featured the two players above, the rude people handling Telkom's presence on X committed the cardinal sin of social media marketing... gate-crashing private moments.

These thick-skinned amateurish clowns jumped in on at least two posts from football fans to make a commercial pitch. Very annoying. And, possibly highly counter-productive because not only would your boorish behaviour get up the noses of the original posters, but you would put your rudeness on displays to thousands of their followers.

While you digest the Onion for this, you Telkom senior managers, get someone to knock some marketing sense, never mind good manners, into your social media operators.

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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