

Mahindra's tongue-in-cheek challenge to the bakkie big boys, and Mediclinic's marketing is sick

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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When it comes to macho, there are few products more oozing in testosterone in this country than bakkies. Rough, tough and hard to bluff, as our Army sergeant used to swear he would make us (...before dissolving into laughter).



Screen grabs from the ad.

These are the sort of products which reduce hard *manne* to tears, as important in their lives as a well-*braai*-ed steak or the exploits of the appropriately named hard man of SA rugby, “Bakkies” Botha. These vehicles speak of a time when men were men, when the world was a simpler place and muscle and fortitude won the day.

And that is reflected in a lot of the marketing we see in the segment, which is the most competitive – not to mention the biggest – in the automotive sector in South Africa.

So, Toyota's Hilux proclaims it is “tougher-er” than its competitors, Ford's Ranger is seen transporting impossible loads in impossible terrain and Isuzu's KB (now known as the D-Max) batters its way through the wilderness on missions of mercy.

“ Where then does that leave Mahindra, the Indian maker of bakkies which, to be kind, falls on the utilitarian, rather than sexy, side of the scale? The vehicles have won a loyal following, particularly in rural, farming areas, where good looks finish a distant second to toughness and reliability. How do you compete, as a challenger brand, with the bigger players? ”

Well, if the most recent ad is anything to go by, you get cheeky and you send up the whole world of macho-ness and bakkies.

So we see a rugged Camel Man-type ploughing through the harsh country of the Eastern Cape, where farming is a hard-scrabble existence. He pulls to a sliding halt in a cloud of dust in his Mahindra double cab and jumps out. He has seen something. Something that needs his help. Something which needs to be rescued.

It's a cute little lamb, about to be attacked by a snake. Without hesitation, Mahindra Man takes out his fence clippers, snips the strands and rescues the cute little bundle. As he strides off, the fence collapses.

We then see him with the lamb – sitting next to him as he drives, holding it in his arms next to the camp fire at night, leaning out of the window, dog-like, as the bakkie traverses the empty space.

Finally, our hero reunites the lamb with its owner (also a Mahindra driver), and walks off, his work done. But he can't stop a tear from falling.

Real men do rescue lambs. Real men do cry. And, of course, real men do drive Mahindra bakkies.

“ It makes me smile for a number of reasons: It pricks the clichéd pomposity of the macho culture and its attendant marketing noise, and it showcases the bakkie, too, in its no-frills, unpretentious stance. It's also uniquely, and old-school, South African, and not some recycled, mid-Atlantic corporatised nonsense. ”

So Orchids to Mahindra, Joe Public United and production company They Films.

In a time of marketing “dear oh dears” – with Pick n Pay topping the social media controversy meter with its quickly-removed coffee mugs for “The Maid” and “The Gardener” – Mediclinic also joined the ranks of companies that seriously make me wonder whether they have no common-sense filters in place in their marketing programmes.



Pick n Pay in the firing line over 'maid' and 'gardener' mugs

31 Oct 2018



The company breathlessly announced a photographic competition for images related to its Mediclinic operation in Stellenbosch... specifying themes, including “Reflections”, “Majestic Mountains”, “Heritage Habitat” and “Vineyards”, among others.

A “curated panel” (OK – I give up: what the hell does that mean?) would select the best photos, which would be framed, “according to the Mediclinic interior design/décor standards” and displayed in the newly built Stellenbosch Mediclinic.

However, it continued “Photographers will be credited for their images, but not remunerated”.

As if Mediclinic hands out operations for free. As one person pointed out on Twitter, if one of the lucky photographers happened to end up on the steps of Stellenbosch Mediclinic, and was dying, they wouldn't get treated for free.

“ This is so cheeky! Getting photographers to supply them with images for free. If anybody can afford to pay for images, it's [@Mediclinic](#)! ”

Those same photographers could die on the Mediclinic front steps and Mediclinic wouldn't even consider giving them any free treatment! 📸📸📸📸 pic.twitter.com/CUamzUPuWJ— Dax Villanueva 📸📸📸📸 ➦ (@RelaxWithDax) [October 30, 2018](#) ”

It didn't take long for someone with a common sense gene to realise the reputation damage this was doing – and the “competition” was pulled.

Marketing expert Gillian Rightford got it spot on when she observed: “Glad they’ve done this. The massive irony of the whole thing being their payoff line ‘expertise you can trust’.”

If I was a Mediclinic boss, I would be really worried that this managed to get as far as it did. Was there not one person there to say “Hey, you can’t do this” or “what happens if people out there don’t like it and have a go at us on Twitter?”

It wouldn't surprise me if this was some PR firm's idea – the sort of PR firm that keeps writers waiting for their money, or which suggests they should work “for exposure”.

So, Mediclinic, you will be credited for this Onion. Unfortunately, we can't afford to remunerate you...

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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