

Cheers to what's in a name

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Two truths: We forget them and think of everyone as pal - and Savanna knows it; Distell's stance of end justifies means deserves a smelly Onion...

I have this really bad habit when I am introduced to someone new. I hear my own name in my head... not theirs. I have to force myself to pay attention because human beings like to be recognised and remembered – and not to do so guarantees a relationship will get off on the wrong foot.

As a journalist with multiple fields of interest, I meet many people in my day-to-day work and, sorry to say, often forget names. It's quite embarrassing at follow-up meetings when I forget names. On many occasions, I “wing it” until I pick up the name elsewhere in conversation... but sometimes I just admit failure and ask for the name to be repeated.

That's why I instantly connected with the Savanna Cider ad called “My Friend”.



Savanna and Grey Africa/WPP Liquid tackle the '#MyFriendZone'

Grey Africa 8 Apr 2021



This works off two basic human truths (always vital in pitching authentic ads, because these resonate with consumers):

First that we forget names and second – and this is a very South African trait – we tend to think of everyone as our friend or mate. These are the people which, as ad agency Grey Africa/WPP Liquid puts it – are a “friend, buddy, bafo, nja yam, bru or china”.

All well and good, but do you know their actual names? If you don't, the idea goes, you can then shove them into that semi-anonymous box known as the #MyFriendZone.

The ad, shot by the legendary Greg Gray of Romance Films, shows us an oke in a pub as someone familiar approaches. He greets the guy like a long-lost mate and they both exchange bro-chat (but no names). When the woman behind the bar asks him who it is, he has nothing.

Never mind, a Savanna will take care of that, brings a smile of recognition – especially in these times of Covid-19, when most of us have seen a lot less of people that we did pre-pandemic.

It also continues the cider's long line of humour, which has become synonymous with the brand, as encapsulated by its most well-known tag line "It's dry but you can drink it".

Orchids to Savanna, Grey Africa/WPP Liquid as well as to Greg Gray and Romance Films.

I decided to continue on with the Orchid for Savanna, even though its parent company, Distell, deserves a smelly Onion for its blatant attempt to sway public opinion to the side of booze makers with its purchase of "research" allegedly showing that while trauma cases in SA under lockdown dropped 60%, this was more likely due to curfews and mobility restrictions.

Lead "researcher" Ian McGorian said the analysis used "linear regression modelling" to understand what effect the alcohol ban had on trauma admissions.

"When you put the ban and the curfew into the model, the outcome is that the curfew has the strongest effect on reduced trauma admissions," McGorian told TimesLIVE.

That story has since been spread far and wide by credulous media who don't ask too many questions. To its credit, the Sunday Times did, in its print edition last week, quote many recognised scientists as questioning the results of McGorian's research and the claim it had been "peer reviewed". The research has not been made public for independent scrutiny.

However, Tom Moultrie, a professor of demographics at UCT, was one of those quickly able to pick holes in McGorian's claims. Taking figures of excess deaths from a SA Medical Research Council report, Moultrie looked at periods from the start of the lockdown, when alcohol was banned, and when it was feely available.

Excluding the first hard lockdown, because it had strict controls on mobility, Moultrie's conclusion was that "the average number of unnatural deaths per week in the periods when alcohol was banned was 26.0% lower than expected.

When alcohol was not banned, the average number was 2.2% lower than expected."

The worrying aspect of this is that, in ads like that for Savanna, Distell is at pains to push messages of safety, such as social distancing, yet it is prepared to pay a Covid denialist like McGorian to conduct "research" favourable to its case. McGorian is a founder member of Panda (Pandemics Data and Analysis), the group of actuaries and others, who predicted at the start of the pandemic that "no more than 10,000" people would die of Covid in SA. They later upped that to a maximum of 20,000.

Now that we sit with a death toll approaching 54,000, Panda says nothing about those numbers, but continues to bang the anti-lockdown drum, and questions PCR test results (frequently calls the coronavirus crisis a “casedemic”), as well as casting doubts on the efficacy of vaccines.

Panda’s type of rhetoric and propaganda has persuaded many reasonable people to avoid the vaccination.

So, Distell, you are supporting that sort of dangerous narrative, which borders on conspiracy theory (doubt that? Look at what Panda has been saying). That’s not a great look for a major brand. All in the name of defending the indefensible... much as gun lobbyists defend the sale of guns, along the lines of “guns don’t kill”, people do.

Booze doesn’t kill, people do. That’s a great Pontius Pilate way to wash your hands of the damage your products do – and funding “research” which underlines that absolutely negates all the other campaigns you run against booze abuse.

If the end justifies the means and you apply that in marketing terms, you’ll always get an Onion from me, Distell.

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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