

Going viral - a double-edged sword for Nigerian brands?

 By [Uzoma Ukah](#)

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Last month, a video of four young men in South Africa went viral when it appeared that they suddenly possessed the power of 'articulation' and 'diction' after drinking water from Woolworths. Apparently, bottled water from the retail brand had the same effect as kissing the Blarney Stone.



Uzoma Ukah.

The brand quickly [latched onto the trend](#), and the Woolworths social media challenge was born. There were reports that sales rose instantly and some of its stores ran out of bottled water as a result of the [#woolieswaterchallenge](#).

Many brands would love to create similar success with their online campaigns, unfortunately there's no clear-cut formula for going viral. It just happens when it does.

Vicissitudes of going viral

On Nigerian social media, it's a different ball game. Experienced digital marketers know that creating content with the prime goal of "going viral" is a wrong first step. It is better to seek first the attention and interest of the audience, then prepare to sustain the outcome.

On Nigeria twitter, where almost everybody has a strong, polarised opinion about something, online virality is a phenomenon that must be approached with care and clarity. It can switch from warm to blazing hot in a minute, therefore, constant monitoring is essential.

Last year, Sterling Bank tried to emulate the open competitive banter of MacDonald's and Burger King with the result of mixed reactions. The bank tweeted a cartoon that seemed to *mock* its peers in a post that was later hashtagged #bankwars.

Although the post created instant buzz and conversations on Twitter- with few banks even responding in kind - the bank ended up having to tweet an apology later.

“ Our apologies go out to all the banks -the likeness of whose logos & buildings featured in a post which we have since deleted.

We remain committed to building an organisation that enables our youth find expression & we will continue to do this in the most responsible fashion. pic.twitter.com/ZBgGBRel9b— Sterling Bank Plc (@Sterling_Bankng) [July 24, 2018](#) ”

This begged the question, was the aftereffect worth the buzz?

Another example was back in 2016 when Chicken Republic, a quick service restaurant, [posted a cheeky cartoon](#) about a then detained public official. The post went viral and drew attention to the brand. While some citizens of Twitterverse welcomed its lighthearted nature, many others thought it was a shot in the foot. Some *tweeps* even threatened to boycott the restaurant. Most Nigerian brands have since learned to stay off political banter as a result.

Navigating Nigeria's social network

There's nothing wrong with going viral. The attention can generate leads, improve public perception and drive brand growth. However, it could also cause the exact opposite.

It is important for brands to understand the context and nature of their audiences. Knowing your brand personality is also vital. Edgy brands that [thrive on controversy](#) like United Colors of Benetton, can get away with stunts regardless. So, choose your *buzz* wisely.

Nigeria's social media space is a very volatile place, and going viral should be treated like a double-edged sword. But riding on a trend as intriguing and universal as speech-articulating water is something everybody can relate to without much ado.

ABOUT UZOMA UKAH

Uzoma is a senior copywriter and marketing strategist with IMS Advertising, one of Nigeria's leading marketing communications agencies. He has over seven years experience in advertising and has worked on brands such as Cadbury, Visa, Heineken, Fayrouz and Total. He is also a Peter Drucker award-winner for his essay "Managing Complexity in the Advertising Workplace". About his work as a copywriter, he doesn't make you buy stuff, he just shows you why you should.

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