

What can marketers learn from the phenomenon that is "Jerusalema"?

 By [Siya Metane](#)

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Imagine how Master KG felt when President Ramaphosa recommended that South Africa take up the "Jerusalema" challenge on Heritage Day. Perhaps it felt better than the day the song hit 100 million views on YouTube. Or better than the day Nigeria's biggest music star, Burna Boy, remixed the song, propelling it right across Africa and straight onto the US Billboard charts. And what about the day the dance challenge started (in Romania of all places) and then spread like wildfire?



Screenshot from [Youtube video](#).

There have been many highlights for Master KG and his collaborator Nomcebo since "Jerusalema" was released in November 2019, every one of them a marketer's dream. The process of a company bringing a new consumer product to market couldn't be more different from an artist releasing a new piece of art, but are there lessons here for product marketers and brand managers?

Timing is everything

Marketers start by lining up all their facts – perceived need, consumer research, price points, etc. When everything is in place they release the product, surrounding it with a big budget to ensure that consumers go out and buy it. It's an expensive undertaking and no company is going to do it unless there's a quantifiable and achievable profit at the end.



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Artists are the opposite. Whether the artist is a painter, writer or musician, they're not producing their art in the expectation of profit, but because they have something inside them that needs expression. It's instinctive and driven by passion and dreams. They put it out there never quite knowing whether it's going to land.

When we study the "Jerusalema" phenomenon, certainly timing contributed to the song's success, coinciding with the

advent of the coronavirus as it did. The world was in shock and everyone was going through a tough time. Along came a song with the universal appeal of an upbeat melody, which was then added to by an easy-to-learn traditional African dance, and it proved to be just what the world needed at the time. This couldn't have been planned for or managed, it just happened.

The case for collaboration

But "Jerusalema" seems to prove that the bigger the need the bigger the impact of the product that addresses it. The need to be reminded of joy and celebration gave the song and its trajectory. How many of the consumer products that are launched into the world every day are really new, and how many answer a real and equally new need?

There is also a lot to be said for the collaboration factor. Master KG made a better song when he invited Nomcebo Zikode to join him, but this was his only intended collaboration. Burna Boy enhanced the song with his remix, a happy but uninvited collaboration, as did the first dance challenge. If anything, "Jerusalema" proves the case for collaboration, even with unexpected partners.

Marketers already know that packaging and distribution are important. What's interesting about Master KG is that he has understood this because he's kept himself in touch with his audience. He knows that he finds most of his fans on Facebook, but he also knows that he has an audience that is not digital. He produced a CD because it was the best way for his grandfather to hear his music, and it turned out his grandfather wasn't the only one who wanted a CD. If anything, he is a master of people with whom he has a deep affinity, a quality that few marketers possess.

The sincerity factor and authenticity

Then there is the sincerity factor. Even though the lyrics are in a little-understood local language, Jerusalem is a holy city sacred to many religions. Using its name made the gospel nature of the song clear for all to see. No doubt it evoked a global subconscious spiritual connection, and that connection is the key. Not to put too fine a point on it, there is something sacred in making a real connection with an audience, whether you're a product, a company or an artist.

Another equally important lesson is about authenticity. "Jerusalema" is a good song that comes from a good authentic place. No doubt Master KG hoped for success but he couldn't have dreamt of the scale on which he's achieved it. His song wasn't motivated by the hard, cold cynicism that profit inevitably requires, but by his passion for his art. How many products do you know that do the same thing or rather have the same passion for the consumer? Obviously, it's hard for a bar of soap to achieve this, but then I would question the necessity of yet another samey consumer product.

I'm not suggesting that every consumer product can be a "Jerusalema" but there's no doubt that many would benefit from addressing a human truth rather than being only driven purely by a profit motive. If the coronavirus and "Jerusalema" have taught us anything it is that commercial consideration doesn't move consumers. Heart does.

ABOUT SIYA METANE

Siya Metane is the CEO of SlikourOLife, a platform for sharing information on urban culture and music, featuring videos and interviews to give substance to the music and to musicians who may not have access to traditional platforms, and offering a more cohesive and accessible place for their videos than YouTube. As a former member of Skwatta Kamp, perhaps the most successful South African hip-hop group ever with cross-over appeal, he knows what content is relevant to the diverse South African audience.

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