

Changing perceptions

 By [Brendan Seery](#)

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Haval: Advert makes mockery of 'Jap crap' opinions of yesteryear; Embarrassing tweet lauds Trade and Industry Minister Ebrahim Patel 'at work'.



If you're a challenger brand entering a market that has years, or even decades, of preference for your potential competitors, it can seem like a daunting task to break preconceptions.

I remember as a child when our family bought our first new car – a Datsun – people thought my parents were slightly mad; not only did my father fight against the Japanese in the war, but the perception was that quality was only something you'd get from English products.

Albert Wessels, the man who founded the business which became Toyota South Africa, had an uphill task, in the beginning, trying to convince Ford and Chev-driving farmers that his new Stout bakkie was better.

The quality of the Toyota ensured that it quickly established itself in the market - and *kyk hoe lyk hulle nou*.

The biggest marketing hurdle for Toyota and other Japanese auto brands, as they started testing global markets from the late '50s and early '60s, was to convince buyers of the quality of their products ... that they were not "Jap crap" as the

disparaging critics put it.

Chinese automakers are facing the same sort of challenges in present-day South Africa. While a huge proportion of our consumer goods originate in mainland China, cars from that country have had a patchy history in SA over the past 20 years.

Some have indeed been rubbish and people have regretted buying them. Yet Chinese automakers can produce good products, as evidenced by the fact they already produce “white label” products for European carmakers in much the same way as much of Apple’s product line is made in China.

A Chinese success story in South Africa has been Great Wall Motors (GWM), which has had a lot of success with its bakkies, which are cheap and cheerful, and reliable. GWM’s upmarket brand, Haval, has been making inroads into the consumer market, especially with its SUVs.

And an ad for the company’s latest product, the Jolion SUV, is going to get a lot of people thinking about the brand, and maybe even getting along with a dealer.

The ad is shot in an industrial setting, with the striking, metallic green Jolion roaring around after an athletic parkour exponent.

It’s a carefully choreographed duet between vehicle and runner.

But at the same time, the expert editing cuts away to show the sort of features like catnip to SA car buyers; a clever digital dashboard and classy-looking knurled automatic gearshift knob that comes straight from the Jaguar school of design.

More than anything, the car looks cool – and cool is the minimum requirement for dipping your toe into the family SUV market.

As a piece of brand awareness, the ad – although not ground-breaking – does a good job of getting the attention of buyers. And getting that first step right is critical to sales success.

So an Orchid to Haval. I look forward to seeing the Jolion shaking things up on the sales charts.

An embarrassing tweet

Communication is important for governments and, when you look at their marketplace – elections and staying in power – then it is a vital marketing tool.

Generally speaking, our government is not great at communication and even our president's ritual addresses to the nation have lost a lot of the charisma and magnetism they had at the beginning of the pandemic when the nation hung on every word he said.

Ministers could, and should, be communicating, but seldom do so at all. And when they do, it often is the type of "foot in the mouth" sort of publicity they, and the government can ill afford.

Someone should tell that to Trade, Industry and Competition Minister Ebrahim Patel. He, like most of his Cabinet colleagues, is conspicuous in his absence from most public platforms and discourse - and I'm not just talking about the recent attempted insurrection where most of the Cabinet stayed in their political foxholes while the country burned, clearly waiting to see who would run out as the winner.

Patel, shockingly bad at "reading the room" (gauging the depth of public feeling), was hailed in a tweet this week by his department, showing him "at work" at the site of a looting clean-up.

Work? What were you doing minister, to justify your multimillion-rand salary?

The last time we saw him doing work was when he was preventing people from wearing open-toed shoes or buying hot chickens at the height of the pandemic.

Many social media users reminded him of exactly that this week.

He looked more of a joke than his comrade, Fikile Mbalula, who, as transport minister, regularly gets ridiculed on Twitter.

So, Comrade Patel, an Onion for trying to appear relevant in public. Rather get on and do some real work.

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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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