

# The paradox of brand boratistan



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BORAT The current report assesses the pros and cons of Sacha Baron Cohens impact on Kazakhstans national brand. In his satire and parody, Cohen's character Borat purported to be from Kazakhstan, and represented many negative stereotypes of formerly Iron Curtain, now free to the world ex USSR satellite nations, including stereotypes of backwards culture, anti-Semitism, and other tropes. The movie was a parody, but it has resulted in serious discussion about the Kazakhstan national brand or image, and how it should be protected. Then again, from another perspective, as the saying goes, any publicity is good publicity, so many people see Cohen's movie as actually bringing wanted attention to the country. It is the overall assumption of the current report that in the movie, the character Borat mostly represented Kazakhstan in terms of very negative stereotypes that hurt the country's national image, especially during a time in which this image was nascent. In other words, before this nation can be known for something positive, it is already in a mud-bath of bad publicity depicting the country's men as pigs and women as abused and ignorant.

Overall, Borat as a character represents very negative stereotypes. The movie doesn't spend much time in the fictional Kazakhstan of wherever it was filmed, but what time is spent there, early in the movie, hits some very hard notes of satire for this very brief period. The audience sees Kazakhstan as a place where donkeys pull half-trucks around unpaved towns, where the men are unafraid to involve their own family in pornography, and where there is no discernable place of culture or development. Then, the movie goes into the infamous and offensive scene of the Kazakhstan parade, in which the "Jew egg" hatches and the villagers celebrate in a ritual of merry and explicit anti-Semitism. This is not incisive, cutting sarcasm; the weapon

is more of a cudgel. And the target, unfortunately, is Kazakhstan. The national image of the country is invariably negative, and, as one Kazakhstan resident complains on the internet, “ Unfortunately, in todays world where everything is about image, when somebody with influence spills mud on you it sticks. I havent watched Borat but read about him everywhere. I think this character is irrevocably damaging Kazakhstans reputation as a country where abuse of women is common and all men are macho fools” (National, 2009). From another perspective, however, one could argue that Borat is a fictional character, protected by free speech, making social commentary. One could also argue, as mentioned above, that any publicity is good publicity. However, by the end of “ Borat,” it is clear that this is not just a case of bad publicity; it is satire in the scathing and no holds barred tradition of Swift. It is as close to Swift as anyone has really gotten since, even Waugh, because Waugh was very clever. Borat approaches comedy with a meat cleaver approach, and when a target gets in his way, it is not just “ bad publicity;” it is a bloodbath. “ People who understand Borats humour know it has little do to with the real Kazakstan, and could be intrigued by a campaign that talks about the real Kazakstan. It is a country that many people have heard about after Borat, but that few people can say much about” (National, 2009). It is unfortunate that Kazakhstan was the target of Cohen’s satire, because as a result, it was portrayed in terms of virulent and negative stereotypes, as a sort of a-cultural backwater in which taboo behavior is taken for granted as a matter of course.

#### REFERENCE

National branding (2009). [http://www.brandchannel.com/view\\_comments.asp?dc\\_id=74](http://www.brandchannel.com/view_comments.asp?dc_id=74)

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