



Case Report

1	Case Number	0101/17
2	Advertiser	SBS Corporation
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Poster
5	Date of Determination	08/03/2017
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.5 - Language Inappropriate language

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The poster campaign promotes SBS's Face Up to Racism week of programs exploring race and prejudice in Australia today (the Season). The purpose of the poster campaign is to generate social media engagement about, and corresponding awareness of, the Season and drive conversations about contemporary issues surrounding race and prejudice. The Season starts on 26 February 2017.

The posters were placed on: Adshel street furniture (bus shelters and railway stations); Shopalive locations (shopping centres); and large format billboards (3 in Sydney, 2 in Melbourne) – at 445 locations in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth.

Relevant specifications:

Adshel: Superlite: 1175mm (w) x 1775mm (h); Yarralite: 1225mm (w) x 1840mm (h);
Metrolite: 1010mm (w) x 1520mm (h)

Shopalive: 1080 pixels (w) x 1920 pixels (h)

Billboards (APN): Sydney: Moorebank 12.4m (w) x 3.3m (h); West Ryde 8m (w) x 2m (h);
City Westlink 12.48m (w) x 3.2m (h). Melbourne: Footscray 18.88m (w) x 4.48m (h); St
Kilda: 16.825m (w) x 3.658m (h)

Campaign duration: Adshel and Shopalive – Melbourne: 6-21 February 2017; all other
markets: 13-21 February 2017; Billboards – 21-24 February 2017.

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

Currently SBS is advertising across Melbourne that there will be a week of programs on Race & Prejudice. I have no issue with the subject but the advertising of "FU2Racism" is clearly offensive to both young and old who do not have to have such blatantly rude advertising thrust in their face. Trying to explain to my child what FU means is not right and should not be permitted. Surely this type of wording is meant to cause to people to look but surely also - it is just outright rude and unnecessary. Come on - lets have some standards for our kids.. What's next - the 'C' bomb to get our attention? Please stop this advertising campaign immediately and advise SBS that they are their for all - not just for the young who use this language now.

The 'f' word or a blatant representation of it was used on the billboard to promote the program

the language used in this tagline is inappropriate for outdoor advertising that will be seen by children. Even if they don't know what the acronym F U stands for, they will ask their parents or friends. While I am anti-racism, I believe the use of this acronym not only normalises the use of swearing in public, but also diminishes our ability to be a respectful society. If it is acceptable to say F U to racism, then why not to anything or anyone else that we don't agree with? In my view, this ad should be immediately removed from bus shelters and anywhere else that it is displayed until they can come up with a tagline that doesn't offend, normalise swearing and normalise disrespect.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

SBS has been asked to provide comments in relation to the issues the complaints raise that fall broadly within Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the Code).

SBS considers that the following clauses of the Code are not relevant on the basis that the advertisement:

- does not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or group on the grounds set out in clause 2.1;*
- does not employ sexual appeal (2.2);*
- does not present or portray of violence (2.3);*
- does not deal with sex, sexuality and nudity (2.4);*
- does not depict material that relates to health and safety (2.6).*

Further, the AANA Code for Advertising & Marketing Communications to Children does not apply, as the advertisement is not directed primarily to children and is not for a product targeted toward and having principal appeal to children. The AANA Food & Beverage Advertising & Marketing Communications Code also does not apply, as the advertisement is not for a food or beverage product.

The complaints relate to clause 2.5 of the Code which states that advertising and marketing communications shall only use language which is appropriate in the circumstances (including appropriate for the relevant audience and medium), and strong or obscene language shall be avoided.

The poster campaign promotes SBS's Face Up to Racism Season (the Season) which highlights and explores racism and prejudice in Australia today. The Season includes SBS-commissioned television programs (Is Australia Racist?, The Truth About Racism and Date My Race) and related radio, online and social media content. The Season starts on 26 February 2017. More information about the Season is set out in the attached SBS Media Release 'SBS Asks Australia to Face Up to Racism' (1 February 2017).

SBS devised the Season 'Face Up to Racism' in response to the results of one of the biggest ever surveys conducted on racism and prejudice in Australia, commissioned by SBS with Western Sydney University for the new SBS documentary Is Australia Racist?

The survey found that one in five Australians had experienced racism in the last 12 months. Other findings were that nearly a third of those surveyed said they had experienced racism within their workplace, and 35 per cent said they had experienced racism on public transport, or on the street.

The Season name and corresponding hashtag #FU2Racism were designed to capture people's attention with a call to action using the phrase 'Face Up to'.

The phrase 'face up to' is defined in the Macquarie Dictionary as: 'to meet courageously; acknowledge; deal with'. It perfectly encapsulates the aim of SBS's campaign to encourage more Australians to watch the SBS programs in the Season and learn more about the issues they explore, and create a greater awareness of the attitudes and behaviours which foster prejudice and division in society. This approach is in keeping with SBS's purpose to inspire all Australians to explore, appreciate and celebrate our diverse world and in doing so, contribute to a cohesive society.

The specific aim of the poster campaign in question is to encourage community engagement on the issue through social media conversations around the SBS program-related content on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The focus of the poster is therefore on the social media hashtag with the tagline 'Face Up to Racism'.

The 'FU2' abbreviation in the hashtag label is consistent with the social media conventions for hashtags under which it is common to use acronyms and numbers to abbreviate phrases in order to make it easier for users to engage in the conversation and debate around the 'Face Up to Racism' Season.

Crucially, the use of 'FU' is not an abbreviation for 'fuck you', nor is the use of 'FU2' an abbreviation for 'fuck you to', or 'fuck you too', and this is made clear in the accompanying material. The hashtag is always followed by the full Season name, 'Face Up to Racism' in the poster campaign. The poster therefore clearly indicates that the 'FU2' is meant to represent the phrase 'Face Up to'.

In developing the poster campaign, SBS took into account the possibility that the abbreviation could be interpreted as an offensive phrase, and in order to make it clear the

'FU' was not an abbreviation for an offensive phrase, the full Season name 'Face Up to Racism' was deliberately and prominently placed alongside the hashtag to ensure that consumers understood and could see the full sense of the reference. In SBS's view, providing this clarification on all of the marketing communication addresses any concerns people may have around having to explain what the 'FU' means to children.

Prior to finalising the poster campaign, SBS referred to the AANA Code of Ethics Practice Note on Language which indicates that 'acronyms that play on the "f" word, e.g. WTF... but do not use the actual word are normally considered acceptable if used in a light hearted and humorous way, are in subtitle rather than spoken word and are appropriate to the situation'. While the hashtag could be read as a play on the 'f' word, we reiterate that the 'F' in the poster is not a reference to an offensive term and this is made clear in the communication.

We compare this to the use of acronyms (such as 'WTF') which is meant to be an abbreviation of an offensive term.

SBS also notes that the phrase 'fuck you to racism' does not make grammatical sense, and so is an unreasonable interpretation of the abbreviation.

For the reasons stated above, the poster does not use strong or obscene language, in contravention of the Code. The fact that the acronym could be interpreted as an offensive phrase is countered by the prominent inclusion of the full Season name as a tagline in the poster, which clearly spells out that it represents the common, non-offensive phrase 'face up to'. Accordingly, SBS considers that the language in the poster is quite distinguishable from language that the Advertising Standards Bureau has previously found to have breached the Code.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board (the "Board") considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the "Code").

The Board noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement uses inappropriate language and is not appropriate for children.

The Board viewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser's response.

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.5 of the Code. Section 2.5 of the Code states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall only use language which is appropriate in the circumstances (including appropriate for the relevant audience and medium). Strong or obscene language shall be avoided".

The Board noted that the advertisement was a poster placed in bus shelters and other venues promoting a week of programs on the SBS channel regarding race and prejudice. The poster included the text "#FU2 Racism – Face up to Racism".

The Board noted the Practice Note to the Code that states that "words and acronyms that play on the "f" word eg WTF and LFMAO, but do not use the actual word are normally

considered acceptable if used in a light hearted and humorous way, are in subtle rather than spoken word and are appropriate to the situation.”

The Board noted that in the current advertisement the use of the letters FU2 racism could be considered strong language by some members of the community. The Board noted that the meaning of the acronym is explained directly below as “face up to racism.” The Board noted that the actual word “fuck” is not used in the advertisement and that the hashtag label is consistent with current trends and social media conventions.

The Board noted that the current advertisement was part of a series of large, outdoor posters which would be seen by a broad audience, including children.

The Board noted that it had previously upheld an advertisement for the same advertiser (0513/16) where a poster advertisement featured a man with a crepe in his hand standing in the street. The text read: ‘F*CK THAT’S DELICIOUS’ and the SBS Viceland logo was visible. The Board noted that the advertisement contained the word ‘F*CK’ and that the ‘U’ in the word had been replaced with an asterisk.

In the above case the Board noted that “...the asterisk did not obscure the meaning of the word, and in the context it was clear what the word was meant to be. The Board also noted that the name of the product being advertised was a television show called ‘F*ck, that’s Delicious’. The Board considered that the meaning of the word in the advertisement was clear enough that most young children would be able to read and understand it.”

In contrast to the case above, in the current case, the Board noted that there was less of the word being used and that the placement next to the hashtag and the rest of the wording, the suggestion of the word “fuck” was less obvious and less likely to be understood by children. The Board considered that the proximity of the written explanation of ‘Face up to Racism’ lessened the impact of any possible suggestion of the “f” word.

The Board considered that the text was not clearly an obscenity and in the context of a program addressing racism issues determined that the advertisement did not use inappropriate language and did not breach Section 2.5 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaints.