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Ad Standards Limited ACN 084 452 666

# **Case Report**

Case Number :
 Advertiser :
 Product :
 Type of Advertisement/Media :
 Date of Determination
 DETERMINATION :

0142-21 Sax Fetish Sex Industry TV - Out of Home 16-Jun-2021 Upheld – Modified or Discontinued

#### **ISSUES RAISED**

AANA Code of Ethics\2.3 Violence AANA Code of Ethics\2.4 Sex/sexuality/nudity AANA Code of Ethics\2.6 Health and Safety

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ADVERTISEMENT**

This advertisement is divided into three parts. Part 1 features nine images which appear on screen for approx. three seconds each.

Part 2 runs for approx. 25 seconds and features the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube logos with the business handle.

Part 3 runs for approx. 45 seconds and features a shirtless man in leather pants and vest walking through the store. Products available are shown as he browses.

Images shown in part 1 include:

Image 1 - Three men dressed in head coverings and leather jock straps. The man on the left is using a flogger on the central man's buttocks. The man on the right is pulling on a chain that is attached to a collar on the central man.

Image 2 – A close up image for two men wearing leather shirts and caps smoking cigars .

Image 3 – A shirtless man wearing a leather chest strap standing over a man who is lying down on a metal table while being wrapped in cling wrap, including over his face.





Image 4 – A man wearing a leather chest strap and underpants, with leather boots and knee pads. He is posed lying on a surface side-facing the camera, with one arm supporting his torso and one leg raised. The man is also wearing a face covering that is shaped like a pig with ears and a snout.

Image 5 – A close-up image of a man wearing a face covering. One of his eyes is visible.

Image 6 – A man wearing a leather chest strap and leather studded cod piece. He is kneeling on all fours in front of a cage. He is wearing a face covering which has ears and a nose, very similar to a dog face.

Image 7 – Two men fully dressed in leather shirts and pants standing together.

Image 8 – This image depicts two men. Man one is standing, wearing a leather apron and face covering and holding a butcher's cleaver raised above the second man. The first man is holding the second man's leather chest strap. Man two is lying on a metal table and is wearing a leather chest strap, leather jock strap and a face covering that is shaped like a pig with ears and a snout.

Image 9 – Two men shown from the chest up dressed in leather shirts and caps standing together.

# THE COMPLAINT

Comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

I fully support freedom of speech and don't object to the store or it's location, however it is hugely problematic to have children (my 6 and 3 year old were in the car and watched the imagery while we waited to make a right turn) exposed to such heavily sexualised imagery featuring complex adult fetishes. I don't think it's unreasonable to ask not to be confronted by (and have to explain to a child) why an adult male is wearing leather dog ears and a ball gag in a cage, at 11:30 on a Wednesday morning. The sexualisation of children and exposure to concepts such as this is hugely problematic and this advertising is irresponsible.

# THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Thank you for your notice of complaint dated 26th May, 2021. Now that I have these further and better particulars I can respond with appropriate and relevant detail.



I will address each of the specific parts of section 2 of the Code of Ethics but I think it would be useful to first examine the mechanics of how this complaint came to the attention of the Ad Standards.

1.0 How was this advertising viewed by the Complainant?

1.1 The complainant alleges that the material in question was viewed from their motor vehicle at 11:30am on Wednesday 12th May, 2021. "children (my 6 and 3 year old were in the car and watched the imagery while we waited to make a right turn)"

By this description, the complainant must have been travelling West along Oxford Street and was waiting to turn right into Darlinghurst Road. The East bound carriageway of Oxford Street does not permit a right-hand turn into South Darling Street so that option can be eliminated.

1.2 One of the most unfortunate aspects of our in-house television display is that it is almost impossible to see during daylight hours, even on sunless days. Our shop window is highly reflective. I am attaching a pic titled "Window from footpath" to demonstrate my point. This photo was taken on Thursday 27th May at approximately 11:30am. I stood approximately 2 meters from the window and could scarcely discern that there was even a TV in the window let alone what it was playing.

The second image I am attaching is titled "Window from the street". I placed myself on the street in the West bound traffic lane directly in front of the store for my best possible view. To take this pic I increased magnification to see if I could discern any greater detail. The results are obvious. I placed my personal safety at a certain risk so that the truth could be presented to Ad Standards. The truth will be at the very centre of my response to this matter. I will demonstrate that "truth" is not at the centre of this complaint.

1.3 I am also attaching a third image titled "Car Position". The white vehicle in this shot is directly opposite the store in the right-hand turning lane. This is the exact position from where I took the photo back to the front of the store "Window from street". "Car Position" identifies where, I surmise, the Complainant claims to have viewed the video display. This shot was taken without magnification. This picture provides a physical depiction of just how far away the Complainant was when they claim to have watched our video display. The white vehicle that I use as my point of reference is approximately 20 metres from the front window of the store.

1.4 The records of the Bureau of Meteorology confirm the weather in Sydney on Wednesday 12th May, 2021 recorded a low of 12.8 c and high of 22.5 c. At 9am the Bureau recorded cloud cover was 4%. At 3pm that same day it was reduced to 2%. This was a beautiful sunny autumn day in Sydney. It would have been impossible for anyone to view our digital display from the footpath. The Complainant would somehow have us believe that they, and their young children, were repelled by our digital advertising from 20 metres away. They further assert that it allegedly caused such grief that it necessitated an uncomfortable discussion around an "explanation" to children of 3 y old and 6 y old.



1.5 I have now had an opportunity to review quite a number of previous complaints and the deliberations by Ad Standards. One consistent theme that really stands out is the proposition that the various Complaints dubiously claim it is children that they are trying to protect. I find myself asking what sort of person would invoke the purity of Childhood innocence to prosecute their abhorrent and unrepresentative personal prejudices? I wonder how many of these complainants even have the children they put forward. Of course, I well understand that fraud and libel are regrettably outside of the scope of Ad Standards.

# 2.0 Accuracy of the Complaint

2.1 "..... This includes shots such as adult men dressed in leather harnesses, dog ears and a ball gag sitting in a cage, men in leather harnesses with their crotch spread (although no genitalia was visible)"

2.2 Our video advertisement can be broken into two parts. The first part is made up of 9 rolling maquis still images representing our products and how they may look on potential customers. The second chapter depicts a shopping experience by a man in leather that is designed to show we operate a retail experience over 3 floors. The second phase of this has not been reference at all by the Complainant so, I believe, we should focus on dealing with the 9 rolling still images only.

2.3 Image 1 – Men in harnesses with absolutely no nudity Image 2 – Close face shot of men smoking cigars in full leather Image 3 – Close face shots with glad wrap – no nudity Image 4 – Man in harness with absolutely no nudity Image 5 – A gas mask. There is nothing further to add here. Image 6 – Pup Play This seems to be a focus of the Complaint so I will deal with that depiction separately. Image 7 – Men in full leather with absolutely no nudity Image 8 – Butcher Shop parody with no nudity Image 9 – Men in full leather with absolutely no nudity

2.4 Each of these images are on display for a total of 4 seconds only. The most vigilant viewer would need great focus to take in the detail of any of these images.

2.5 "Men in Harnesses" are best addressed under Community Standards which I will get to below.

"A man wearing dog ears". Yes. that is correct. If it was an advert for Honey Birdette with a woman wearing Pussy Cat ears would this come under the same salacious assessment or is this just another example of latent homophobia? In 1960 Playboy Magazine introduced Bonnie Halpin to the world as their first ever Playboy Bunny brand mascot. After 61 years is misogyny so intrenched that a similarly playful brand mascot could not be a young man? Women portrayed as pussy cats or bunnies have not confronted Community Standards from a time (long) before I was born.



"A man with their crotch spread" - The pose required the model to support himself by arching his left leg on the plinth. His crotch is not spread. It is a disturbed mind that could be so fixated by an entirely covered male crotch to appraise this image in such a way. Again, this smells of homophobia. I contend that a contemporary depiction of a female model would invite considerably less criticism by virtue of our ever maturing "Community Standards".

To be very clear - There are no images of any models wearing ball gags or in cages. This hysterical misrepresentation by the complainant is consistent with the misinformation as to how this advertisement was allegedly viewed by them. It is already obvious that facts and truth have not formed the underlying basis of their complaint.

# 3.0 Prevailing Community Standards

3.1 The year is 2021. We enjoy all that goes along with a socially advanced pluralist liberal democracy. Australia is a modern society with a largely wide acceptance of an incredible spectrum of opinions and positions. I would like to reference here a Complaint previously brough to the attention of Ad Standards. The reference is Complaint 97/02 widely known through the community as the Voodoo Hosiery Dalmatian billboard campaign. I am sure I don't need to, but I am attaching that determination here. There are some startling similarities between the Complainant then and the Complainant here. Those billboards were installed around Australia in 2002. Yes, some 19 years ago. I believe our Community Standards have continued to evolve towards greater acceptance since that time.

*"I found the image of a woman walking along with two naked men on dog leashes on their hands and knees very offensive...sexist and derogatory..."* 

I have two daughters aged 4 and 7 and I must ask them to close their eyes every time we pass it. believe we should have the right to preserve the innocence of our children and not have this type of thing forced upon us."

3.2 We carefully chose images exclusively depicting men so that there could not be any suggestion of the degradation of one gender by the other. Men being photographed with other men was to represent an equal power base and categorically exclude claims of gender exploitation or demeaning behaviour.

3.3 Sax Fetish is located on Oxford Street Darlinghurst. The business was first established in 1979 and we still plug away at finding the right mix of superior customer service and present a vast array of quality products. We proudly manufacture more than 40% of those products right here in Australia. Sax commenced as a business selling handcrafted leather sandals, belts and leather luggage. Over the very many years we have evolved quite considerably in order to service new niche markets that have arisen from maturing Community interests and standards. The



strategy continues to evolve and so do the tastes of our customer base. We are a much loved Community involved business.

3.4 The key point is that Oxford St has been our home for a very long time. The history of Oxford St is intrinsically entwined with the bold, brassy and sometimes brash history of the GLITBQ+ community. We survive and succeed by being constantly aware and reacting to maturing Community tastes and standards. The video depiction, that is the subject of this complaint, has played on a constant loop since April 2020. Not one single person has complained or made any comment on the subject matter until now. Men in harnesses in actual real life have not been an uncommon occurrence on Oxford Street for the past 40 years. Tens of thousands know us, see us and have no issue with us and our right to conduct ourselves as a quiet and respectful business. The unrepresentative voice of one person who seeks to impose their nasty views on society does not represent the legal definition of the "reasonable man". The reasonable man (or woman or otherwise identifying) is represented by the huge number who have no Community concern and see no reason to make any representation.

- 4.0 Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics
- 4.1 2.1 Discrimination or vilification There is nothing in our video representation to support that this would apply.

# 2.2 Exploitative or degrading

I utterly reject that there is anything in our advertising that is exploitative or degrading. Quite the opposite. The images embody empowerment and consent.

# 2.3 Violence

There are absolutely no visual representations of violence. If anything, we present our entire business model as an excellent level to discuss to the very important matters around consent that obviously need far greater discussion in our society.

# 2.4 Sex, Sexuality & Nudity.

None of these matters are portrayed in any way by inference, suggestion or deliberate omission of context. I consider any suggestion to the contrary constitutes libel and would welcome the advice and assistance of Ad Standards towards the protection of my good reputation and that of my business. This is a matter I take very seriously. Any summary review of the material we voluntarily provided Ad Standards clearly shows there is absolutely no nudity depicted in our advertising.

# 2.5 Language

This is a video advertisement only. There is no sound track. There is no dialogue or text.

2.6 Health and Safety



Not applicable.

2.7 Distinguishable as Advertising

Throughout the video viewers are asked to like us on Facebook, Twitter and each and all of our social media platforms. It is incomprehensible that it could be construed as anything but an advertisement for the business.

The complaint is scurrilous and not supported by fact. I believe I have conclusively demonstrated there are sound reasons to believe the Complainant has fraudulently presented a case that is entirely baseless. I fully support freedom of speech however it is hugely problematic when people attempt to invoke the idea of children when attempting to impose their unrepresentative views on others. The entire context of this complaint is hugely problematic to me and frankly irresponsible.

I urge the committee to reject this matter out of hand as a vicious fabrication. I contend this Complainant would benefit from a form of professional help that Ad Standards is regrettably not charged to provide.

# THE DETERMINATION

The Ad Standards Community Panel (the Panel) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the Code).

The Panel noted the complainant's concerns that the advertisement depicts sexualised imagery featuring complex adult fetishes which is inappropriate for display in the front window of store where children can view it.

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

Section 2.3 Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not present or portray violence unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised.

The Panel noted the Practice Note for the Code includes:

"Sexual violence is not acceptable. The Community Panel has also found that a strong suggestion of menace presents violence in an unacceptable manner and breaches this section of the Code... advertisers should exercise caution when using cartoon violence as a cartoon style may be attractive to children".

# Does the advertisement contain violence?

Image 3 - The Panel noted that this image depicts two men in a BDSM style scenario in which one man is having his body and face covered in cling wrap. The Panel considered that this image did contain violence.

Image 8 - The Panel noted that this image depicts two men in a BDSM style scenario in which one man wearing a pig mask is being held down and having a blade raised



towards him in a manner similar to a butcher theme. The Panel considered that this image did contain violence.

# Is the violence depicted justifiable in the context of the product/service advertised?

The Panel noted that the issue of consent concerning sexual matters is of significant concern to the community.

The Panel noted that sexual violence is never appropriate, however depictions of consensual BDSM encounters between adults are not necessarily depictions of sexual violence.

The Panel considered while that Images 5 and 8 may depict a consensual relationship between all parties, there is no imagery or language for viewers to make a determination and the impression of the advertisement is of a sexually aggressive scenario.

The Panel considered that while the advertisement is promoting a store which sells sexual fetish products and showing people wearing/using the products is not necessarily unreasonable, showing such violent scenes such as those in Images 5 and 8 is not justifiable in the context of the product/service advertised.

# Section 2.3 conclusion

In the Panel's view the advertisement did depict violence that was not justifiable in the context of the product advertised and did breach Section 2.3 of the Code.

# Section 2.4: Advertising or Marketing Communications shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

The Panel noted the Practice Note for the Code states:

"Overtly sexual images are not appropriate in outdoor advertising or shop front windows.

"Although not exhaustive, the following may be considered to be overtly sexual:

- Poses suggestive of sexual position: parting of legs, hand placed on or near genitals in a manner which draws attention to the region;
- People depicted in sheer lingerie or clothing where a large amount of buttocks, female breasts, pubic mound or genital regions can be seen; The use of paraphernalia such as whips and handcuffs, particularly in combination with images of people in lingerie, undressed or in poses suggestive of sexual position;
- Suggestive undressing, such as pulling down a bra strap or underpants; or
- Interaction between two or more people which is highly suggestive of sexualised activity.



"Discreet portrayal of nudity and sexuality in an appropriate context (eg advertisements for toiletries and underwear) is generally permitted but note the application of the relevant audience. More care should be taken in outdoor media than magazines, for example.

"Images of models in bikinis or underwear are permitted, however, unacceptable images could include those where a model is in a suggestively sexual pose, where underwear is being pulled up or down (by the model or another person), or where there is clear sexual innuendo from the ad (e.g. depicting women as sexual objects)."

# Does the advertisement contain sex?

The Panel considered whether the advertisement contained sex. The Panel noted the definition of sex in the Practice Note is "sexual intercourse; person or persons engaged in sexually stimulating behaviour".

Image 1: The Panel considered that the men in the advertisement are engaging in sexual activity and considered that the advertisement did contain sex.

Image 2: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and standing together in a non-sexualised manner. The Panel considered this image did not contain sex.

Image 3: The Panel considered that the men in the advertisement are engaging in sexual activity and considered that the advertisement did contain sex.

Image 4: The Panel considered that the man is not clearly engaging in sexual activity however considered that most members of the community would consider behaviour such as wearing fetish clothing to only occur during sexual activity. The Panel considered that the advertisement did contain sex.

Image 5: The Panel considered that the man is not engaging in sexual activity. The Panel considered this image did not contain sex.

Image 6: The Panel considered that the man is not clearly engaging in sexual activity however considered that most members of the community would consider behaviour such as wearing fetish clothing to only occur during sexual activity. The Panel considered that the advertisement did contain sex.

Image 7: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and standing together in a non-sexualised manner. The Panel considered this image did not contain sex.

Image 8: The Panel considered that the men in the advertisement are engaging in sexual activity and considered that the advertisement did contain sex.



Image 9: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and standing together in a non-sexualised manner. The Panel considered this image did not contain sex.

Video - The Panel considered that the man is shopping in the store and is not engaging in sexual activity. The Panel considered this image did not contain sex.

# Does the advertisement contain sexuality?

The Panel noted the definition of sexuality in the Practice Note is "the capacity to experience and express sexual desire; the recognition or emphasis of sexual matters".

Image 1: As the men are engaged in sexual activity, the Panel considered that the advertisement did contain sexuality.

Image 2: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and standing together in a non-sexualised manner. The Panel considered this image did not contain sexuality.

Image 3: As the men are engaged in sexual activity, the Panel considered that the advertisement did contain sexuality.

Image 4: As the man is engaged in sexual activity, the Panel considered that the advertisement did contain sexuality.

Image 5: The Panel noted that while the image in isolation shows a man wearing a gas mask and is not clearly sexualised, in the context of a fetish store and with the text "Sax fetish" superimposed over the image the impression is one of a sexual matter.

Image 6: As the man is engaged in sexual activity, the Panel considered that the advertisement did contain sexuality.

Image 7: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and standing together in a non-sexualised manner. The Panel considered this image did not contain sexuality.

Image 8: As the men are engaged in sexual activity, the Panel considered that the advertisement did contain sexuality.

Image 9: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and standing together in a non-sexualised manner. The Panel considered this image did not contain sexuality.

Video – The Panel noted that the video in the latter half of the advertisement depicts man wearing leather pants walking through the store and products available for purchase are visible. The Panel considered that such a scene does depicts sexuality.



#### Does the advertisement contain nudity?

The Panel noted that the definition of nudity in the Practice Note is "the depiction of a person without clothing or covering; partial or suggested nudity may also be considered nudity".

Image 1: The Panel noted that the men are wearing jock straps and chest straps and considered that this is a depiction of partial nudity.

Image 2: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and considered this image did not contain nudity.

Image 3: The Panel noted that the men are shown from the chest up and are only wearing chest straps. The Panel considered that this is a depiction of partial nudity.

Image 4: The Panel noted that the man is wearing a jock strap, chest strap, knee pads, boots and a mask. The Panel considered that this is a depiction of partial nudity.

Image 5: The Panel noted that the advertisement is a close up of a person's face considered this image did not contain nudity.

Image 6: The Panel noted that the man is wearing a cod piece, chest strap, boots and a mask. The Panel considered that this is a depiction of partial nudity.

Image 7: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and considered this image did not contain nudity.

Image 8: The Panel noted that one man appears to be wearing only an apron, and the other man is wearing a jock strap, chest strap, boots and mask. The Panel considered that this is a depiction of partial nudity.

Image 9: The Panel noted that the men in the advertisement are fully dressed and considered this image did not contain nudity.

Video – The Panel noted that the man walking through the store is shirtless and wearing leather pants. The Panel considered that this is a depiction of partial nudity.

#### Summary of images

The Panel considered that:

Image 1 did contain sex, sexuality and nudity.
Image 3 did contain sex, sexuality and nudity.
Image 4 did contain sex, sexuality and nudity.
Image 5 did contain sexuality.
Image 6 did contain sex, sexuality and nudity.
Image 8 did contain sex, sexuality and nudity.



The video did contain sexuality and nudity.

Image 2 did not contain sex, sexuality or nudity. Image 7 did not contain sex, sexuality or nudity. Image 9 did not contain sex, sexuality or nudity.

# Are the issues of sex, sexuality and nudity treated with sensitivity to the relevant audience?

The Panel noted that the definition of sensitivity in the Practice Note is "understanding and awareness to the needs and emotions of others".

The Panel considered that the requirement to consider whether sexual suggestion is 'sensitive to the relevant audience' requires them to consider who the relevant audience is and to have an understanding of how they might react to or feel about the advertisement.

The Panel noted that this image appears in a store window on a television screen. The Panel noted the advertiser's response regarding the accuracy of the complaint and the complainant's location.

Overall, the Panel considered that the relevant audience for this advertisement includes retail workers, people shopping in the Sax Fetish store and people who are not shopping at Sax Fetish but who are walking or driving past the store on Oxford Street, and that this last group may include children.

Image 1 - The Panel considered that the depiction of men in BDSM style clothing using a flogger on another man is a depiction of a highly sexualised scenario which most members of the community would find confronting and inappropriate to be displayed in a store window facing the street.

Image 3 - The Panel considered that the depiction of men in a BDSM style scenario in which one man is having his body and face covered in cling wrap is a depiction of a highly sexualised scenario which most members of the community would find confronting and inappropriate to be displayed in a store window facing the street.

Image 4 - The Panel considered that the depiction of a man in a fetish style costume intended to represent a dog is a depiction of a highly sexualised scenario which most members of the community would find confronting and inappropriate to be displayed in a store window facing the street.

Image 5 - The Panel noted that while the image in isolation shows a man wearing a gas mask and is not clearly sexualised, in the context of a fetish store and with the text "Sax fetish" superimposed over the image the impression is one of a sexual matter. However the Panel considered that the close up nature of the image makes the sexual reference unclear and the business is able to use their business name in the



advertisement. The Panel considered that this image is moderately sexualised but is not inappropriate for a broad audience.

Image 6 - The Panel considered that the depiction of a man in a fetish style costume intended to represent a dog is a depiction of a highly sexualised scenario which most members of the community would find confronting and inappropriate to be displayed in a store window facing the street.

Image 8 - The Panel considered that the depiction of men in a BDSM style scenario in which one man in a pig mask is being held down and having a blade raised towards him in a manner similar to a butcher theme is a depiction of a highly sexualised scenario which most members of the community would find confronting and inappropriate to be displayed in a store window facing the street.

Video - The Panel noted that it is not unreasonable for an advertiser to showcase items available for purchase in their store, and considered that there is not an explicit focus on any sexual products during the video. The Panel noted that some members of the community may prefer that such a business not advertise in a manner which is visible for a general audience, however considered that the video is not highly sexualised. The Panel considered that this video is moderately sexualised but is not inappropriate for a broad audience.

# Section 2.4 Conclusion

The Panel determined that: Images 2, 4, 7 and 9 of the advertisement did treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant broad audience and did not breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

The Panel determined that Images 1, 3, 5, 6 and 8 of the advertisement did not treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant broad audience and did breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

# Section 2.6: Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.

Image 3 - The Panel noted that this image depicts two men in a BDSM style scenario in which one man is having his body and face covered in cling wrap. The Panel considered that while such an act may be performed in consensual relationships, such a depiction is inappropriate to display to a general audience that may include children as some viewers may not understand the nuances of this scene and try to replicate it.

Image 8 - The Panel noted that this image depicts two men in a BDSM style scenario in which one man wearing a pig mask is being held down and having a blade raised towards him in a manner similar to a butcher theme. The Panel considered that while such an act may be performed in consensual relationships, such a depiction is inappropriate to display to a general audience that may include children as some viewers may not understand the nuances of this scene and try to replicate it.



#### Section 2.6 conclusion

The Panel considered that the advertisement did contain material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety and determined that it did breach Section 2.6 of the Code.

#### Conclusion

Finding that the advertisement did breach Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.6 of the Code, the Panel upheld the complaint.

# THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE TO DETERMINATION

Please be advised that the advertising referred to in this matter has been taken down.