



Ad Standards Community Panel
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Advertising Standards Bureau Limited
ACN 084 452 666

Case Report

1	Case Number	0188/19
2	Advertiser	SBS Corporation
3	Product	Entertainment
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Print
5	Date of Determination	26/06/2019
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Religion

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This print advertisement features the words "Blessed be the fruit", with the word "fruit" crossed out and replaced with the word "fight".

THE COMPLAINT

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

That advertisement is offensive to those of the Christian faith, and especially Catholics. The quote "bless is the fruit" is a biblical quote, from Luke 1:42, and also forms the basis of the ancient prayer the Hail Mary. The "fruit" referred to is Jesus Christ, Whom Christians believe to be the incarnation of God.

To use that sacred reference, and to cross it out and substitute it with the word "fight" is sacrilegious, blasphemous, and offensive to people of the Christian faith. Furthermore, it is deliberately so. The subtext to the advertisement is obviously to conflate the evil regime depicted in the drama with the Catholic faith.



THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

SBS appreciates the opportunity to provide comment in relation to this complaint.

Description of advertisement

Print campaign promoting the premiere of third season of the popular SBS drama The Handmaid's Tale. The purpose of the campaign was to generate awareness of the new season that started on 6 June 2019.

The print campaign featured a front page strip and accompanying double page spread print advertisement on the following page.

The media buy was for the day of premiere only, 6 June 2019, and ran across the three News Corp press titles: The Herald Sun, The Daily Telegraph and The Courier Mail.

Digital copy of the advertisement

A digital copy of the advertisement is provided via the 'Advertiser response to complaint' online facility.

Advertiser's response to complaint

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).

Sections of the Code that do not apply

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

- does not employ sexual appeal (2.2);*
- does not present or portray violence (2.3);*
- does not deal with sex, sexuality and nudity (2.4);*
- does not contain language that is inappropriate for the circumstance (2.5);*
- does not depict material that relates to health and safety (2.6);*
- is distinguishable as advertising (2.7).*

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.

Clause 2.1 of the Code – Discrimination or vilification on account of religion

The complaint states that the advertisement is "sacrilegious, blasphemous and



offensive to people of the Christian faith". The complaint relates to clause 2.1 of the Code which states that advertising or marketing material shall not portray people or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of religion.

The Handmaid's Tale is a TV adaptation of acclaimed author Margaret Atwood's award-winning novel of the same name. It is the fictional story of life in the dystopia of Gilead, a totalitarian society in what was formerly part of the United States. Facing environmental disasters and a plunging birth-rate, Gilead is ruled by a fundamentalist regime that treats women as property of the state. As one of the few remaining fertile women, the character June Offred (Elisabeth Moss) is abducted and 'trained' as a Handmaid: women forced into sexual servitude as a last desperate attempt to repopulate a devastated world. The Handmaid's Tale is a powerful and thought-provoking series that has generated discussion and debate around the world about important societal issues including feminism, women's rights, political power and government control. The series has received critical and popular acclaim and is now in its third season. SBS broadcast series one in 2017, and season two in 2018.

The end of the second season saw the protagonist June choose to remain in Gilead to fight for her daughter Hannah. The 13-episode third season of The Handmaid's Tale is driven by June's resistance to the dystopian regime of Gilead and her struggle to strike back against overwhelming odds. Startling reunions, betrayals, and a journey to the terrifying heart of Gilead force all characters to take a stand, guided by one defiant prayer: "Blessed be the fight."

The complaint refers specifically to the text "Blessed be the fruit fight" (the quote) in the creative.

The novel and TV series use biblical precedent and symbolism to describe the dystopian society, which is 'built on the foundation of the 17th-century Puritan roots that have always lain beneath modern-day America'. The use of biblical or religious metaphors to convey meaning is a common literary technique.

"Blessed be the fruit" is the standard greeting amongst fictional Gilead residents in both the novel and the television series. It is used in the biblical sense to encourage fertility, Now in it's the third season, the use of this phrase as a greeting is broadly associated with the series in popular culture.

For the marketing campaign this well-known quote from the series was subverted to 'Blessed be the fight' to capture the attention of viewers and tease the direction of season 3 which sees a growing resistance against a totalitarian state.

In the context of the advertisement in question, the quote clearly refers to use its use in the program as indicated by the associated text and images. The large image



depicts the protagonist June and the surrounding text states 'Season 3, The Handmaid's Tale' and indicates the date and time of premiere as well as 'Watch or Stream' and the logos of SBS and SBS ON Demand. Further the strip on the front page of the paper 'Praise Be The Revolution' alerts readers to the content and prepares them for the stunt that follows. The use of the quote in this context does not discriminate against or vilify members of the Christian community. It is not discriminatory to use a biblical or religious phrase as a literary device to convey meaning in relation to a fictional TV series, nor does it amount to vilification. The use of the quote does not, as the complainant states, 'conflate the evil regime depicted in the drama with the Catholic faith', it merely serves to symbolise that the Handmaids have found a new purpose, which is to fight, not to procreate in the context of the fictional TV series The Handmaid's Tale.

THE DETERMINATION

The Ad Standards Community Panel (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 was blasphemous and offensive to people of the Christian faith.

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

The Panel considered whether the advertisement complied with Section 2.1 of the Code which requires that 'advertisements shall not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.'

The Panel noted the Practice Note to Section 2.1 provides the following definitions:

"Discrimination – unfair or less favourable treatment.

Vilification – humiliates, intimidates, incites hatred, contempt or ridicule."

The Panel noted that this print advertisement depicts the main character of the television program The Handmaid's Tale and the text "Blessed be the fruit" The Panel noted that fruit was crossed out and replaced with the word "fight".

The Panel noted the complainant's concerns that the advertisement was offensive as it used a biblical quote, and to change that quote by crossing out "fruit" is sacrilegious, blasphemous and offensive to people of the Christian faith.

The Panel noted that it had previously considered the issue of blasphemy in



advertising on several occasions, including in case 0036/16 in which the phrases “Thank God” and “Jesus” are used. In this case:

“The Board acknowledged that some members of the community with very strong Christian beliefs could find the use of the Lord’s name to be offensive to their faith but considered that most members of the community, including Christians, would find that using the phrases, ‘Thank God’ and ‘Jesus’ as expressions of relief and disbelief is not aggressive and is not attacking or discrediting the Christian faith”.

The Panel noted that the television program *The Handmaid’s Tale* does have references to religion, and the quote “Blessed be the fruit” is a phrase used within the program as a greeting.

The Panel noted the advertiser’s response that the last season of the television program ended with the main character choosing to remain and fight for her daughter. The Panel considered that the crossing out of “fruit” and replacing with “fight” is directly connected to the storyline and promotion for the coming season.

The Panel considered that the use of the quote in this context was clearly used in relation to the storyline of the advertisement product and that it was not being used in a way which was targeted towards people of Christian faith.

The Panel considered that a religious phrase of itself was not something which depicts or suggests that Christians receive unfair or less favourable treatment, or which would humiliates, intimidates, incites hatred, contempt or ridicule of anyone on the basis of religion.

The Panel determined that the advertisement did not discriminate against or vilify any person or section of the community on account of their religion and did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Panel dismissed the complaint.

