



Case Report

1	Case Number	0192/11
2	Advertiser	My Peace
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Billboard
5	Date of Determination	22/06/2011
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification - Religion

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

MYPEACE Billboard Campaign, "JESUS A PROPHET OF ISLAM"

THE COMPLAINT

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

This is associating Jesus Christ with a religion such as Islam. Obviously the differences between Christianity are substantial and the message which it is projecting is complete nonsense. No Christian in their right mind would want Jesus Christ to be associated with Islam. This billboard has specifically been designed in order to spark outrage and to offend Christians. This advertisement needs to be banned and removed immediately.

•Is the Government aware that an Islamic group MyPeace plans to launch a billboard advertising campaign on government buses and elsewhere that will include statements such as "Jesus-A Prophet of Islam"?

•Does the Government acknowledge the offensive nature of that slogan for those who believe in Jesus Christ because Jesus was not a prophet of Islam but the Son of God?

•Is the Government aware that Mohammed the founder of the Muslim religion was born 700 years after Jesus Christ so Jesus Christ could not be a prophet of Islam?

•What action will the Government take to prevent these controversial billboards being displayed on government buses and elsewhere?

Jesus the man and God of peace must not be associated with such aggressive religion.

First of all it demeans Christ to be merely a Prophet and not God as Christians believe. This is a form of discrimination against Christians and our belief. I am deeply offended and I believe so many fellow Christians will be offended when this ad will be released during the next month.

If you need a petition it can be supplied.

This advertisement is offensive as it declares Jesus as a prophet and attempts to compare two opposing religions; Christianity and Islam. THIS IS OFFENSIVE. Such advertisement WILL cause animosity between the religions (and most likely vandalism) as it makes a declaration that abuses Christianity. This is all imposing a religion amongst society and feels like an invasion of beliefs.

As a Christian I find this advertisement totally offensive! It has upset my child immensely. What she knows of Islam she has learnt from watching mainstream news broadcasts and to have her Saviour identified as being part of this malicious cult was very traumatic!

This advertisement attacks all Christian beliefs due to the fact that we believe that Jesus is the son of God and not a prophet. Secondly, he had nothing to do with Islam since Islam came 700 years after Jesus. It also gives the wrong message to Christian children who are still too young to understand.

These Muslims are using the name of Jesus due to his popularity around the world to spread their religion and laws. That is an abuse to his name as to us Christians; he is divine being the son of God.

I mean try walking into an Asian temple and destroying of their Buddha statues on purpose and see what happens.

I am simply disgusted.

I would like to reiterate that these billboards should be banned and removed and there should be a ban on advertisements that are inaccurate about Christianity and offensive to Christians.

I am disgusted that such a thing would be allowed to be advertised on a billboard. This is wrong in every way possible to those of the true faith; please remove the signs from everywhere they are intended to be!

The billboards are inaccurate and misleading Jesus was born over 700 years before Mohammed and it factually untrue and illogical to say that he was a prophet of Islam given what Jesus said about faith and religion and who he was; and it is extremely offensive for Christians and non-Christians. There is no need for a religious group to use the core of another faith to promote interest in their religion. If they want to talk about common features in Christianity and Islam, this is not one of them.

I understand and respect that the Muslim culture is entitled to its religious views and to practice them in our country. However as Muslim residents in Australia I would also expect they show the same respect for our religious belief system.

There is absolutely no chance a 'Jesus is the Son of God' billboard would be displayed in Iran; and rightfully so.

I ask that as The Advertising Standards Bureau responsible for the governance of offensive advertising, you organise to have the billboards removed.

As a citizen of this great country and a Christian I find these to be offensive and inappropriate ... Whilst I believe everyone has a right to practice their faith, just ask yourself this: Would we be allowed to advertise Christianity or hand out Bibles in Iran? I think Not. .. I request that the Advertising Standard Bureau responsible for allowing this offensive type of advertising have it removed as soon as possible.

This is offensive as it makes religious proclamations which insult Christianity.

This is offensive as it does not consider the values of Christians. Anti-Christian sign.

This is offensive as it does not consider Christian values and disrespects Christianity.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the complaints.

The complaints mostly relate to the advertisement "Jesus - a Prophet of Islam.", whilst a small number of them also relate to the other advertisement with the message, "Abraham. Noah. Moses. Jesus and Muhammad – Prophets of ... Islam." These advancements are displayed on two billboards in Sydney as well as on a number of public buses, bus shelters and websites.

I strongly believe that the advertisements do not breach section 2 of the Australian Association of National Advertisers Code of Ethics. They do 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." To the contrary, it was our intention that these advertisements would help reduce discrimination and vilification against certain sections of the Australian community, and in particular Muslims.

Unfortunately the experiences of Muslims living in Australia have not always been positive, and in this regard, I would like to draw your attention to a report, "Isma – Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians""published by the Australian Human Rights Commission. In that report, the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner, Dr William Jonas AM, summarised the experiences of over 1400 Arab and Muslim Australians who were consulted as part of that project in the following words: What we heard was often disturbing. Participants identifiable as Arab or Muslim by their dress, language, name or appearance told of having been abused, threatened, spat on, assailed with eggs, bottles, cans and rocks, punched and even bitten. Drivers have been run off the road and pedestrians run down on footpaths and in car parks. People reported being fired from their jobs or refused employment or promotion because of their race or religion. Children have been bullied in school yards. Women have been stalked, abused and assaulted in shopping centres. Private homes, places of worship and schools were vandalised and burned. 'Terrorist' 'Dirty Arab' 'Murderer' 'Bloody Muslim' 'Raghead' 'Bin-Laden' 'Illegal immigrant' 'Black c..t' are just some of the labels and profanities that we were told have been used against Arabs and Muslims in public places. Arab and Muslim Australians were told to 'Go back to your own country', even those whose families have been in Australia for many generations. Perhaps more troubling than the nature and intensity of discrimination and vilification is the impact such incidents had on participants. Many Arab and Muslim Australians said they were feeling isolated and fearful. 'I don't feel like I belong here anymore' was a common sentiment.

Yet not all participants experienced discrimination or vilification and those who did often qualified their comments by explaining that in the majority of circumstances, they were treated with respect. As one participant explained, 'Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of good people out there, but there are these very few people that are making a bad impact on a lot of us.' For most Arab and Muslim Australians, discrimination and abuse is not an everyday occurrence. However, when it does happen, it leaves a lasting impression that contributes to a sense of alienation, distrust and fear of future discrimination and attacks.

... Arab and Muslim Australians have not been passive 'victims' of discrimination - they have challenged negative stereotypes and misinformation about their communities in a range of positive and creative ways. Governments too have sought to quell the worst manifestations of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done.

It is disheartening to know that some of the complainants to the ASB used labels such as "malicious cult" to describe Islam and the Muslims have been variously described by them as "a minority of unassimilated, confrontational fundamentalist" and "most of them are terrorist and extremist who just plan to destroy the harmony of the Australian community." It was these misunderstandings about Islam and Muslims amongst a small section of the Australian community which led us to put up the advertisements. The aim of the advertisements was to create a better understanding of Islam, to create tolerance towards Muslims and to educate people on what Islam and Muslims are. It was our way of challenging negative stereotyping and misinformation about Islam and Muslims. It was never our intention to cause any offence to any members of the community by claiming Jesus as a prophet of Islam.

As many people may not be aware, in Islam, Jesus is considered to be a Messenger of God and the Messiah who was sent to guide the Children of Israel with a new scripture, the Gospel [The Oxford Dictionary of Islam, p.158]. The Qu'ran mentions Jesus many times [for example, in "Jesus, Son of Mary" in Oxford Islamic Studies Online says that Jesus is mentioned 25 times in the Qu'ran]. It states that Jesus was born to Mary as the result of virginal conception, a miraculous event which occurred by the decree of God.

Like Christians, Muslims also believe that Jesus will return to earth near the Day of Judgment to restore justice and to defeat Masih ad-Dajjal, also known as the Antichrist. The advertisements do not in any way challenge any of the beliefs in the Christian or other faith. Instead it highlights the commonality of Islam and other mono-theistic religions, such as Judaism and Christianity. It conveys the message that, like Christians, we, the Muslims also regard Jesus with extreme reverence. It also conveys the message that, like Jews and Christians, we also regard Abraham, Noah and Moses with reverence. The idea being that the people will see beyond the words in the advertisements and recognise that Islam and Muslims are not much different from any other ordinary Australian.

It should be noted that there have been overwhelming positive response to these advertisements, and we have received hundreds of supportive e-mails from members of the wider community. There are also many Ministers from various Churches who have called us in support of the advertisements and the positive impact they will have in promoting tolerance and acceptability of cultural and religious diversity amongst Australians.

THE DETERMINATION

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

The Board noted complainants' concerns that the advertisement vilifies the Christian faith by associating Jesus with Islam, is insulting to people holding the religious belief that Jesus is the son of God, and gives a false and alarming impression to children.

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.1 of the Code. Section 2.1 of the Code states: “Advertising or Marketing Communications 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 race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability or political belief.”

The Board noted that the advertisement contains a statement about the beliefs of Islam. The Board acknowledged that the Islam faith does consider that Jesus is a prophet of Mohammed.

The Board agreed that some members of the community would be offended or upset by the statement as it is a statement that would be inconsistent with Christian beliefs.

The Board noted that any religion has the right to advertise its beliefs provided that such advertisements do not discriminate against or vilify people in the community on account of their religion.

The Board considered that a statement about the beliefs of a faith or religion may be offensive to people who do not hold those beliefs but that such a statement does not, of itself, discriminate against or vilify people who hold different beliefs.

Considering the particular wording of this advertisement, the Board considered that the statement is a reflection of a belief of followers of Islam and that the statement is presented in a manner that does not discriminate against or vilify Christians.

The Board determined that the material depicted did not discriminate against or vilify any person or section of the community on account of religion and did not breach section 2.1 of the Code.

The Board noted complainant concerns that the advertisement would confuse children and may be frightening to children. The Board considered that the advertisement does not contain frightening material and that it is not unreasonable for children to be exposed to a variety of information in their daily lives some of which may conflict with the views with which they are raised. The Board considered that exposure to material which may conflict with a person’s own views is not a breach of the Code and in the present case the billboards do not suggest violence.

Further finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on any other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.

