



Case Report

1	Case Number	0194/14
2	Advertiser	Energizer Australia Pty Ltd
3	Product	Toiletries
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Internet - Social
5	Date of Determination	11/06/2014
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

- 2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Gender
- 2.2 - Objectification Exploitative and degrading - women
- 2.4 - Sex/sexuality/nudity S/S/N - general

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

A female model repeatedly removes tshirts bearing the face of a man. The final scene shows her removing a tshirt and then pausing and a text block appears over her apparently naked breasts reading, "Click here to see what happens next". We then see the razor and a male voiceover describes the benefits of the product.

THE COMPLAINT

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

Schick is sexually objectifying women to sell razors.

This product is "Schick for men", this is not a women's grooming product. It is difficult to see how Schick could justify the use of a woman stripping other than for the purpose of sexual objectification.

What is the connection between a topless woman and a men's razor?

Using Facebook - a social media platform for users aged 13+ - to promote this video is socially irresponsible. The first video sexually objectifies women, the lure "click here to see what happens next" leads viewers to more explicit content. (The second video "we're revealing it all") One does not need to be signed in to YouTube to view this video. So even the most basic safeguard (YouTube sometimes requires viewers to sign in for 18+ content) is not in place to prevent the video being seen by minors.

Further to this, other videos on YouTube that are shown to be relevant to this, include pornographic videos. Schick's sexually objectifying campaign therefore leads viewers to pornographic content.

The process of uploading images to the app presents participants with a line of up of women they would like to "get closer" with. These are the models who will "wear" the t-shirt in the online gallery.

Women are presented as objects to be selected and then their bodies are used as a canvass for this promotion. The women are shown 'wearing' the various shirts (competition entries) in the online gallery and their heads are cropped from the image. The images are made available to share on social media, both promoting Schick razors and sexual objectification of women on Facebook.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

Energizer owns the Schick brand for razors and shaving products.

Energizer takes its responsibilities under the AANA Code of Ethics (the Code) seriously and submits that the Advertising does not breach any provisions of the Code, each of which are considered in detail below.

I observe that there is no suggestion that the Advertising is in breach of any Commonwealth or State laws, nor that any issues arise under the AANA Code for Advertising and Marketing Communications to Children. As a Facebook campaign, the Advertising is only accessible to those aged 13, and more particularly to consumers who have "liked" Energizer's Schick Facebook page. The Facebook page is intended to appeal to men of shaving age, and as a social media-based advertisement for men's razors, the Advertising is not in any way targeted at under 18s.

The Advertising

The "Get Closer" campaign on the Schick Men Australia Facebook page supports the launch of the new Schick "Hydro 4-in-1 Groomer" razor. It includes one main promotional video (the Main Video) and a second, behind-the-scenes style video (Second Video), both of which are also available on YouTube (together, the Videos). The Videos are linked to what is intended to be a light-hearted, user-generated content page that allows subscribers to the Schick Men Australia page to upload a profile photo so that it is displayed on the t-shirt of one of the Schick models.

Section 2.1 – Discrimination or Vilification

Energizer submits that there is no issue under this section of the Code. The Advertising does not portray women or depict material in a way that is capable of discriminating against or vilifying a person or section of the community on account of their gender.

The woman in the Videos is depicted as happy, confident, attractive and secure in her surroundings. This carries through to the images of the models on the Schick Men Facebook page, who have similar confident poses and upbeat expressions. While this is undeniably a portrayal of women as 'feminine', the clear intention and effect on the audience is an admiration and appreciation of the beauty and outgoing personalities of the models. In no way does it amount to or promote less favourable treatment of any one or more women on the basis of gender or constitute material capable of inciting hatred towards, serious contempt for, or ridicule of women. To reach the opposite conclusion would not be in accordance with prevailing attitudes and standards in the Australian community – as recognised by the AANA Code of Ethics Practice Note, which observes that “[p]ortraying a woman as attractive does not of itself constitute discrimination or vilification of women”.

The underlying concept of the Advertising – female models wearing t-shirts with a man's face on them – is a playful theme tailored to the predominantly male, social media-based audience for the Advertising. In the Videos, it directly promotes the product as the men are pictured shaving. Overall, the concept is entirely appropriate for a promotion of men's razors directly to adult male consumers and cannot be reasonably understood as making any comment about the role of women in society in general.

Section 2.2 – Objectification

While the Advertising employs sexual appeal, this is at all times positive, discreet and appropriate to the limited circulation of the Advertising on social media. It is neither exploitative nor degrading of any individual or group of people, and cannot be reasonably considered in breach of this provision of the Code.

In this respect, I observe that the Board's definition of exploitative as “clearly appearing to purposefully debase or abuse a person, or group of persons, for the enjoyment of others, and lacking moral, artistic or other values” and the definition of degrading as “lowering in character or quality a person or group of persons”. [1]

Neither of these definitions are breached by the Advertising. As described in the response to section 2.1 above, the model in the Videos is at all times presented as confident, happy, secure in her surroundings and in control of her decisions. The models on the Schick Men Facebook page are presented in the same way through their poses, expressions and short “bios”.

Further, while the women are depicted in a sexually appealing way, this is always discreet and appropriate to circulation on social media:

The model in the Videos wears a t-shirt and black bicycle shorts.

The models on the Facebook page wear sleeveless tops or t-shirts and are only shown from the waist up.

When the model removes her top in the playful “behind the scenes” Second Video, props and camera angles are carefully used so that no more than her midriff is shown at any point. The effect is suggestive, rather than explicit, and was inspired by a scene from the 1997 film

Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery, in which the “naked” characters are consistently covered by a variety of objects (even though the scene in question also contains much stronger sexual innuendo than the Advertising, the film was rated PG in Australia).

Where the models are wearing a t-shirt with a man’s face, this is clearly promoting the advertised product, particularly in the Videos where the men are shaving with a razor, as well as in the image gallery where the Schick branding is used.

At all times, the poses of the women (and the behaviour and poses of the model in the Videos) are playful and flirty rather than strongly sexualised.

The result of this positive, discreet portrayal is that the models in the Advertising come across as confident and are viewed by the audience with appreciation and admiration. There is no suggestion of a threatening or predatory gaze, or anything else that would objectify or demean the models (or women in general). The use of feminine sexual appeal is relevant to the product in that the Advertising was developed to communicate to the male social media audience how a well groomed man appeals to women, in a way that would cause them to remember the Schick brand and talk positively about the new Schick “Hydro 4-in-1 Groomer” razor.

It is unfortunate that the complainant was shown links to more explicit content when viewing the Videos on YouTube. However, Energizer cannot be held responsible for this functionality of the YouTube platform.

I observe that the research commissioned by the Board in 2013 indicated that the Australian community considers advertising that employs sexual appeal to be unacceptable “when ads were able to be viewed by children, if the ad showed sexual acts, if the product was aimed at younger people, children or families, and if there was no direct relevance to the product being advertised”.^[2] None of these aspects are present in the Advertising, which reinforces the comments above as to the reasons the Advertising cannot reasonably be considered in breach of section 2.1 of the Code.

Section 2.3 – Violence

The Advertising does not portray any violence, and therefore no issue arises under this section of the Code.

Section 2.4 – Sex, sexuality and nudity

The Advertising complies with this section by treating sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience.

Energizer repeats its comments above in relation to Section 2.2 of the Code regarding the sexual appeal of the Advertising. In summary, for the reasons described above, the Advertising portrays sexuality and nudity discreetly, positively and sensitively in a manner that is appropriate to the context (social media advertising of men’s razors, intending to convey the message that a well-groomed man is attractive to women). The tone (including the poses and behaviour of the models) is playful and flirty rather than overtly sexual, and the gaze of the audience is appreciative rather than objectifying or exploitative.

This treatment of sexuality and nudity is clearly appropriate to the relevant audience. The Advertising is displayed on the Schick Men Facebook page, and the Videos may also be accessed on YouTube. It is intended to be viewed by potential purchasers of Schick men's razors, namely adult men, in the private, opt-in environment of social media. This is a limited, adult audience, and the discreet sexual appeal of the Advertising is clearly appropriate for such an audience. In fact, the Advertising deliberately sets out to disappoint the audience in this regard, particularly by showing only the model's midriff in the Second Video. YouTube did not consider that the material justified a requirement that viewers "sign in" to verify that they are over 18, and Energizer supported this decision.

For these reasons, Energizer considers that the Advertising is well within the requirements of section 2.4 of the Code.

Section 2.5 – Language

The Advertising does not use any language that could reasonably be considered to raise an issue under this section of the Code.

Section 2.6 – Health and safety

The Advertising does not contain any material that a reasonable person could consider to be contrary to prevailing community standards on health and safety.

[1] AANA Code of Ethics Practice note, p 3 and Advertising Standards Bureau, Determination Summary, "Use of sexual appeal in an exploitative and degrading manner", April 2014, p 1-2.

[2] Advertising Standards Bureau, Determination Summary, "Use of sexual appeal in an exploitative and degrading manner", April 2014, p 5.

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 the complainant's concerns that the advertisement depicts a woman stripping off in a manner which is sexually objectifying as there is no relevance between her actions and the product advertised.

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

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.2 of the Code. Section 2.2 of the Code states: “Advertising or marketing communications should not employ sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative and degrading of any individual or group of people.”

The Board noted that this advertisement was seen online at the product’s Facebook page and features a woman repeatedly removing t-shirts with men’s faces on them until she is naked and that the viewer is then invited to click on the screen to see what happens next.

The Board noted the complainant’s concerns that the woman has no relevance to the product advertised (a man’s razor) and is exploitative. The Board considered that it was common practice for advertisers to use attractive models, both male and female, to promote a wide range of products. The Board noted that whilst the advertised product is targeted to men the Board considered that it was a product also used by women.

The Board recognised that some members of the community would find the use of a woman progressively undressing in an advertisement for a man’s shaving product to be exploitative but considered that the woman in the advertisement appears confident and empowered and in the Board’s view the woman is not presented in a manner which is exploitative or degrading.

The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.2 of the Code.

The Board considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.4 of the Code. Section 2.4 of the Code states: “Advertising or Marketing Communications shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience”.

The Board noted that although the woman does remove her clothing she is wearing more clothing underneath except in the final scene and considered that in this final scene her breasts are covered by text on screen. The Board noted that whilst some members of the community would find the use of a woman stripping to be in bad taste, in the Board’s view the level of actual nudity is not inappropriate in the context of a limited audience of Facebook members. The Board noted that the model’s behaviour in the advertisement is flirtatious but considered that it was not sexualised.

The Board noted that when you click on the screen to see more you are directed to a post-advertisement film which shows the model liaising with members of the advertising team once the filming of the advertisement has finished. The Board noted that the model remains topless throughout this piece of film but that strategically placed objects, body parts or other people mean that her breasts are never exposed to the viewer. The Board considered that the model’s behaviour and the reaction of the advertising team to her nudity is depicted in a professional manner and considered that overall the level of nudity is not inappropriate.

The Board considered that overall the advertisement and the follow-on film do treat the issue of sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant social media audience.

The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.4 of the Code.

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

