



**ADVERTISING  
STANDARDS  
BUREAU**

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## Case Report

1	Case Number	0218/14
2	Advertiser	Sportsbet
3	Product	Gaming
4	Type of Advertisement / media	Internet - Social
5	Date of Determination	25/06/2014
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

### ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Religion

### DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The Balloon is in the shape of a statue (inspired by Christ the Redeemer) wearing a green and gold soccer guernsey which has the Sportsbet logo and the hashtag #KeepTheFaith printed on it. The Balloon took flight in Melbourne on Tuesday, 10 June 2014 and in Sydney on Friday, 13 June 2014.

The Facebook Advertisements use images and a video which were taken during the Balloon's flight in Melbourne. The Facebook Advertisements are comprised of three Facebook posts which were posted to Sportsbet's Facebook page at

<https://www.facebook.com/sportsbetcomau> on 10 June 2014. The three posts are outlined below:

- Post 1: Sportsbet updated the cover photo of its Facebook Page with an image of the Balloon flying over Melbourne (which in turn created a post on Sportsbet's Facebook timeline, informing Sportsbet's followers of the update).
- Post 2: image of the Balloon flying over Melbourne with the text "We believe in World Cup miracles #KeepTheFaith [www.KeepTheFaith.com.au](http://www.KeepTheFaith.com.au)".
- Post 3: video of the Balloon flying over Melbourne with the text "Jesus, that's a big balloon! And we flew it over Melbourne to rally support for our Socceroos #KeepTheFaith".

### THE COMPLAINT

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

*I am a catholic person and as Christianity is the majority religion in Australia I find this inappropriate!*

*As a Christian, I found the appropriation of the figure of Jesus Christ to spruik a betting firm offensive. It suggests that Christ himself would associate with a gambling company and promote betting trivialises the Christian faith and I find it blasphemous and derogatory. Its blasphemous, not in good taste and inferring that Christianity and Jesus condones gambling. Not a great thing for my children to see. The reason is clear: they are using Christ to advertise their services. It is insulting and it should not be on the internet. The advertisement is degrading towards Christianity. The advertisement is defaming the image of Christ.*

## **THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE**

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

*While not all of the Complaints specify which Facebook Advertisement they relate to, as illustrated above, the imagery and underlying themes are virtually the same in all three posts. As such, they will be treated as one and the same in this letter.*

### *Sportsbet's response to the Complaints*

*Sportsbet has considered the Complaints and does not seek to shy away from the importance of advertising its services in a responsible manner. That being said, Sportsbet firmly rejects that the Balloon or the Facebook Advertisements in any way breach section 2.1 or any other section of the Code.*

*The Oxford Dictionary supports our contention that the Balloon and Facebook Advertisements do not breach section 2.1 by either discriminating against or vilifying any person or section of the community on account of their religion. According to the Oxford Dictionary to "discriminate against" is to "make an unjust or prejudicial distinction in the treatment of different categories of people." With respect to vilification, the Oxford Dictionary states that to "vilify" is to "speak or write about in an abusively disparaging manner." Having regard to these definitions, we submit that it is clear that the Balloon and Facebook Advertisements do not discriminate against or vilify a person on account of their religion.*

*In addition, while some of the complainants have expressed that they were offended by the Balloon and Facebook Advertisements, which is unfortunate, the concerns the complainants raise in the Complaints are by and large outside the ambit of section 2.1 and the Code generally, thereby lacking any foundation under the Code. Even so, Sportsbet used the shape of Christ the Redeemer to inspire the design of its Balloon because the statue is synonymous with, and symbolic of Brazil, the host country of the World Cup.*

### *Conclusion*

*Sportsbet regrets if the jovial nature of the Balloon and Facebook Advertisements were either misconstrued or may have offended the complainants, but we firmly reiterate our view that the Balloon and Facebook Advertisements do not breach the Code.*

*For the reasons mentioned above, Sportsbet believes that the Complaints lacks foundation and should be dismissed.*

## **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 complainants’ concerns that the advertisement is a giant hot air balloon of Christ the Redeemer with the words, “Keep the Faith” on its chest and that this is offensive and sacrilegious.

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

The Board 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 Board noted this internet advertisement features an image of a hot air balloon which has been modelled on Brazil’s Christ the Redeemer statue and a video showing the balloon being inflated and flown in the skies.

The Board noted the complainants’ concerns that the use of a hot air balloon shaped as Christ the Redeemer is offensive to people with Christian beliefs.

Consistent with its decision in case 0217/14 regarding the hot air balloon itself, the Board noted that the Christ the Redeemer statue that the hot air balloon is clearly modelled on is an iconic symbol of Brazil and is often used to promote that nation to the world. A minority of the Board noted that whilst a religious icon can be used as a popular image associated with a specific nation this does not lessen its religious connotations and considered that unlike the television version of the advertisement (0211/14) the image is clearly intended to be Christ the Redeemer and the use of this religious icon to promote gambling would be offensive to some members of the community.

Following considerable discussion however the Board noted that the FIFA World Cup is currently being held in Brazil and considered that whilst some members of the community would prefer that gambling not be advertised at all, in the Board’s view it is not sacrilegious, offensive or inappropriate to use a well-known national symbol to advertise a product associated with a sporting event being held in that nation.

The Board noted the complainants' concerns that the phrase "keep the faith" is insulting to Christians. The Board noted that this phrase is a reference to keeping religious faith but is also commonly associated with having faith in a sports team. The Board noted it had previously dismissed complaints about an advertisement for Sportsbet featuring a Christ-like figure on a surf board with the text, "...walk on water..." in case 0159/11 where:

"The Board noted that the combination of the appearance of the figure and the wording do give the impression that the figure is supposed to be Jesus, although the Board considered that the phrase "walk on water" is a general phrase which relates to someone who performs very well or can do no wrong. Although clearly intended as a depiction of Jesus, there is nothing negative in the depiction of Jesus surfing.

The Board considered that although the imagery of the advertisement could be considered offensive to some people with strong Christian beliefs, in the Board's view the overall tone of the advertisement is light-hearted. The Board considered the advertisement does not denigrate Christianity or Christians, and does not discriminate against Christ or Christians."

Consistent with its previous determination in case 0159/11 and in case 0211/11 which also features an image of Christ the Redeemer, the Board considered that in this instance the phrase "keep the faith" is not inappropriate and does not discriminate or vilify people with Christian beliefs.

The Board considered that both the still images and the video advertisement of the hot air balloon flying in the skies do not depict material which discriminate against or vilify a section of the community on account of religion.

The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

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