



Ad Standards Community Panel
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AdStandards.com.au

Ad Standards Limited
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Case Report

1. Case Number :	0287-19
2. Advertiser :	Sportsbet
3. Product :	Gambling
4. Type of Advertisement/Media :	TV - Pay
5. Date of Determination	11-Sep-2019
6. DETERMINATION :	Upheld - Modified or Discontinued

ISSUES RAISED

AANA Code of Ethics\2.1 Discrimination or Vilification
AANA Code of Ethics\2.2 Exploitative or Degrading

DESCRIPTION OF ADVERTISEMENT

The Panel noted this Pay TV advertisement features a woman wearing a South Carolina sash and formal wear on a stage next to a male host in a white suit. Other women wearing sashes can be seen in the background. The sound of an audience applauding can be heard as the woman is handed a microphone by the host and another person hands her a phone. She holds the phone so the Sportsbet App can be easily seen. The voice over states, "Sportsbet's new iPhone app is so easy to use." The woman states, "I personally believe that apps such like as Sportsbet that make it easier for people to use because...Apps".

The male host raises his eyebrows in a way which suggests the woman's response is awkward. Another contestant behind her claps enthusiastically at her response. The voice over states, "The new iPhone app from Sportsbet, it's foolproof." A superimposed yellow box with the word "foolproof" is stamped over the woman.

THE COMPLAINT

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



It portrayed a woman as being stupid with her dialogue about apps while at the same time being attractive. It is insulting to women. The beauty contest compere also acted as if the woman was stupid. I found it very distasteful.

The only time a woman is shown in the entire advert she is portrayed as stupid and useless in a beauty contest. Surely in this era we can do without this kind of stereotype and advertising can be successful without women in a poor light.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

We refer to your letters dated 20th, 22nd, 23rd, 26th and 29th August 2019 and the Complaint mentioned above regarding Sportsbet's 'Foolproof' advertisement (Advertisement), a digital file of which is attached.

The Complaint

Ad Standards has identified the following sections of the AANA Code of Ethics (Code) as those which may have been breached based on the Complaint:

2.1 Advertising or Marketing Communication 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, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.

2.2 Advertising or Marketing Communication shall not employ sexual appeal: (a) where images of Minors, or people who appear to be Minors, are used; or (b) in a manner which is exploitative or degrading of any individual or group of people.

Sportsbet's response to the Complaint

Sportsbet rejects that the Advertisement breaches sections 2.1, 2.2 or any other section of the Code for the reasons outlined below.

Section 2.1 of the Code: Discrimination or Vilification

In short, the Advertisement does not discriminate against or vilify any person or group of people on account of race, nationality, gender or any basis.

As described in detail below, the portrayal of the main character in the Advertisement is purely satirical and without prejudice to, or disparagement of, any particular individual or the female gender.



The Community Panel's views on 'discrimination and vilification' are well known and the extremely serious nature of discrimination and vilification is highlighted by the Community Panel's published views on each as outlined below:

Discrimination: Acts with inequity, bigotry or intolerance or gives unfair, unfavourable or less favourable treatment to one person or a group because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability and/or political belief.

Vilification: Humiliates, intimidates, and incites hatred towards, contempt for, or ridicule of one person or a group of people because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability and/or political belief.

The Advertisement does not in any way depict material which discriminates or vilifies any individual or a group of people. Rather, it merely attempts to use satire and humor to convey the message that Sportsbet's new app is easy and simple to use. As the Community Panel is aware, the Advertisement is one of a series of Sportsbet advertisements which seek to depict a series of individuals doing silly or foolish things as a humorous way to illustrate that use of the app is 'foolproof'. The characters in the advertisements are varied, and this Advertisement features a beauty pageant contestant giving a particularly silly answer to a question from the host, which is a commonly parodied type of scene or setting. The reference to 'South Carolina' is incidental only, and is included only for humorous context given the popularity of these types of pageants in the US.

Clearly, none of the required elements of inequity, bigotry, intolerance, contempt or inciting hatred (among others) are present in the Advertisement.

Section 2.2 of the Code: Exploitative – women

Section 2.2 of the Code relevantly prohibits advertising which 'employs sexual appeal in a manner which is exploitative or degrading of any individual or group of people'. With respect, the Advertisement does not in any way employ 'sexual appeal' (which include 'images such with a suggestion of sex, some nudity, a sexual pose or tight clothing') at all, nor is it exploitative or degrading in any way toward any individual or group of people.

Rather, the main character in the Advertisement is dressed in conservative attire, being asked a question by the host of the pageant, where the character then provides a ridiculously non-sensical answer to the question. There is no 'sexual appeal' present or intended in the Advertisement (and for completeness, in any event, there is no individual or group of people who are exploited or degraded by the Advertisement).

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined below, Sportsbet submits that the Advertisement does not in any way breach the Code. Again, Sportsbet regrets if the nature of the Advertisement was misconstrued and acknowledges from reading the Complaints that the intended humour in the Advertisement was not to everyone's tastes.



However, with respect, as the Community Panel has recognised, 'the issue of bad taste is one that does not fall within the scope of the Code', and Sportsbet is very careful to ensure that it's advertising fully complies with the Code, and it submits that this Advertisement does so.

*AANA, 'Code Crux: discrimination and vilification' at:
<https://aana.com.au/knowledge/blog/code-crux-discrimination-vilification/> (19 June 2018)*

*Ad Standards, 'Discrimination and vilification' at
<https://adstandards.com.au/issues/discrimination-and-vilification> (accessed on 14 August 2019)*

Ad Standards Community Panel Determination, 'Manscaping', Case Ref. 0137-18 (11 April 2018)

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 complainants' concerns that the advertisement implies women are unintelligent.

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

The Panel noted this Pay TV advertisement features a woman wearing a South Carolina sash and formal wear on a stage next to a male host in a white suit. Other women wearing sashes can be seen in the background. The sound of an audience applauding can be heard as the woman is handed a microphone by the host and another person hands her a phone. She holds the phone so the Sportsbet App can be easily seen. The voice over states, "Sportsbet's new iPhone app is so easy to use." The woman states, "I personally believe that apps such like as Sportsbet that make it easier for people to use because...Apps".

The male host raises his eyebrows in a way which suggests the woman's response is awkward. Another contestant behind her claps enthusiastically at her response.

The voice over states, "The new iPhone app from Sportsbet, it's foolproof."

A superimposed yellow box with the word "foolproof" is stamped over the woman's neck.

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 that the Practice Note for Section 2.1 of the Code of Ethics provides the following definitions:

Discrimination – unfair or less favourable treatment

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

The Panel noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement implies women are unintelligent.

The Panel noted the advertiser's response that the advertisement is part of a series which uses satire and humour to convey the message that the new app is easy to use, and that the advertisement does not in any way depict material which discriminates against or vilifies any individual.

The Panel noted the advertiser's response that this is part of a series of advertisements, however noted that it can only consider the content of the individual advertisement which is the subject of the complaints, and not the wider campaign.

The Panel noted that the scenario in the advertisement was a parody of an incident at a 2007 Miss Teen USA pageant, where a contestant from South Carolina struggled to answer a question about maps. The Panel considered that many people viewing the advertisement would not be aware of this incident and would not recognise this to be a parody.

The Panel considered that the expression on the male hosts face, the voice over stating, 'it's' foolproof' and the word 'foolproof' stamped across the woman's neck combined to give the impression that the woman was being ridiculed for being unintelligent.

The Panel noted that there is an existing stereotype that women who enter beauty pageants are not intelligent, as well as an existing stereotype that blonde women are unintelligent.

The Panel noted the Practice Note for the Code provides that, "Advertisements can humorously suggest stereotypical aspects of an ethnic group or gender, provided the overall impression of the advertisement does not convey a negative impression of people of that group."

The Panel noted that it had previously considered the issue of stereotypes of blonde women being unintelligent in case 0181-18, in which:

"The Panel considered that although the advertisement does not specifically refer to women, blonde jokes are stereotypically at the expense of women and that implication can be inferred in this advertisement. The Panel considered that the overall impression of this advertisement is one of an outdated and poor stereotype that blonde women are unintelligent, which is a negative stereotype and in the Panel's view incites ridicule of blonde women."



Similar to the previous determination, the Panel considered that the current advertisement conveys the overall impression that women who enter beauty pageants are unintelligent, which is a negative stereotype, and in the Panel's view this incites ridicule of these women.

The Panel determined that the advertisement did depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a section of the community on account of gender and did breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

The Panel 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 or degrading of any individual or group of people."

The Panel first considered whether the advertisement used sexual appeal.

The Panel considered that the woman in the advertisement was dressed in formal attire and there was no focus on her body. The Panel considered that the language and visuals in the advertisement did not draw attention to the woman's body or suggest that the woman was a sexual object.

The Panel acknowledged that many people in the community feel that beauty pageants are outdated and exploitative of women, however considered that the setting of a beauty pageant on its own does not amount to a depiction of sexual appeal.

The Panel considered that the advertisement did not contain sexual appeal, and therefore did not breach Section 2.2 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did breach Section 2.1 of the Code, the Panel upheld the complaints.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE TO DETERMINATION

The advertisement will be discontinued across all mediums from Sunday 29 September.