



Case Report

1	Case Number	0428/14
2	Advertiser	Australian Rotary Health
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV - Free to air
5	Date of Determination	22/10/2014
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Mental Illness

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

A voiceover says, "Hat Day flicks the switch on mental health" and we see a spotlight shining on a cartoon character before other cartoon characters, all wearing hats, are shown. A hat falls on the central figure and he begins to dance. The other figures join in the dancing and the voiceover explains that having a hat day on October 10th can help raise money for research in to mental health.

THE COMPLAINT

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

I was extremely offended by this advertisement because, as a sufferer of a mental illness, I feel like I have been represented as stupid and abnormal. This advert further deepens people's distorted and wrong images and impressions of people suffering mental illness. It's completely wrong and could have real potential if done right by someone who understands mental illness and will explain it, not degrade it. Thank you.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

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

The advertisement is a CSA created for use as part of a national advertising campaign to promote public participation in Hat Day 2014. Hat Day is an initiative of Australian Rotary Health, designed to raise much needed funds for mental health research. Individuals are encouraged to register a Hat Day event where work colleagues, team mates, friends or family donate online, come together and wear a hat.

Mental health remains an uncomfortable topic for discussion and the idea behind the creative concept was to "shine a light" on this difficult subject in a way that would reflect the Hat Day ethos, ie - to have fun in support of a serious cause.

First developed for the 2013 Hat Day campaign, the idea was also to create a look and feel that would differentiate Hat Day from the many other charity campaigns in market, one that would be both memorable and have some longevity.

Apart from allowing us to take a lighter approach to the subject, illustration and animation were used because they are visually compelling, easily adaptable to all mediums, instantly familiar across age groups and flexible, in that cartoons allow depiction of 'human like' characters that bear no direct resemblance to any one individual or group.

The opening frame of the CSA represents the often isolating effects of mental illness. The story unfolds to show how people, particularly in organisations, can join together, wear their hats and make a difference by having fun in support of a serious cause.

The music track and the dance animation are deliberately based on the pop culture 'Harlem Shake' style where an individual, often alone amongst a larger group, starts to move with the music, the music builds and then as the bass drops, everyone begins to dance.

The characters in the Hat Day CSA are not meant to be representative of people suffering from mental illness. Instead they are universal characters; representative of all people and the idea that people can come together as a group (on Hat Day) and in doing so support an organisation dedicated to improving the lives all those who may be suffering from mental illness.

Please note: The concept for this CSA was first developed in 2013 and was shown to 2 members of our Research Committee who are both research professors in mental health. Neither had an issue with the concept of using the cartoon figures.

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 concern that the advertisement presents a person with mental illness in a manner which is discriminatory.

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 the advertisement features cartoon figures dancing whilst wearing hats whilst a voiceover says that “Hat Day flicks the switch on mental health”.

The Board noted the complainant’s concern that they believe the cartoon characters in the advertisement are presenting people with mental illness as “stupid and abnormal”.

The Board noted the advertiser’s response that the cartoon characters used in the advertisement were supposed to be easily identifiable human-like figures with no direct resemblance to any one individual or group and were not meant to be representative of people suffering from mental illness.

The Board acknowledged that mental illness is a serious issue which should be treated with care but considered that in this instance the most likely interpretation of the advertisement is that it is promoting a way in which to feel part of a group, by wearing a hat. The Board noted the advertiser’s response that the central cartoon character is presented in a manner which “represents the often isolating effects of mental illness” and considered that the features and characteristics of all of the cartoon figures represent a metaphor of feeling alone and then part of a group and are not intended to be representative, or mocking, of mental health issues.

The Board noted the advertiser’s response that the advertisement was screened by research professors in mental health and considered that overall the complainant’s interpretation of the advertisement would be unlikely to be shared by the broad community.

The Board considered that the advertisement did not portray or depict material which discriminates against or vilifies a person on account of mental illness.

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 complaint.