



## Community perceptions research 2012 - overview

In 2012 the Advertising Standards Bureau commissioned research to test, once again, the five core provisions of the AANA Code of Ethics. This research conducted by Colmar Brunton Social Research assessed current community attitudes and also sought information about possible shifts in community standards and the Board's alignment with those standards.

Since 2007 the Bureau has conducted research into the extent to which Board decisions about advertisements align with how the community would apply the Codes and whether or not they meet with requirements of the AANA Code of Ethics.

In 2007 we first tested the five key provisions of the Code of Ethics: discrimination and vilification, language, sex, sexuality and nudity, violence and health and safety. In this first research community views aligned closely with Board decisions in the areas of language, violence and health and safety. Community views indicated a level of conservatism in relation to advertising containing sexualised images of women and sexual references – while indicating a greater degree of tolerance of advertisements using humour based on ethnic or racial stereotypes.

In 2009 we focused more closely on Board decisions around violence to assess community attitudes against more detailed aspects of violent images or images and depictions considered graphic in advertising. We found a very high correlation between Board decisions and community views, with the one area of discord being a higher level of concern in the community about graphic images in government advertising around health and safety.

In 2010, we devoted research resources to carefully considering the extent to which the Board's decisions aligned with community views around the acceptability of references to and images of sex, sexuality and nudity in advertising. The results of this research indicated that the community had greater concerns than the Board as a whole around sexualised images in public places. Community concerns centred on graphic or unsubtle images that children would see, but accepted that there is a place in advertising for references to sex, sexuality and nudity. Placement of the advertisement, subtlety of the sexual reference and relevance to product being key factors in whether the community considered such advertising acceptable.

### Research results in brief

Our 2012 research indicates that community views and Board decisions appear to have shifted relative to each other in a couple of areas.

Our research also shows a continuing high level of support for the self-regulation system and the Code of Ethics administered by the ASB, as well as a continued high level of unprompted recognition of ASB (62%). In almost all cases tested, the research shows the Code sets tougher standards than the community itself would apply.

Overall in 2012 we find that:

- the community is in general more conservative than the Board regarding themes of strong language and sex, sexuality and nudity. With regards to language there was widespread concern over the exposure of children to strong language. This is an area where community views appear to have become more conservative since 2007.
- the community is less conservative than the Board regarding issues relating to Health and Safety, Violence and Discrimination. This appears to be the case particularly with regards to the use of racial or religious references in a humorous context, but less so with regards to depictions of women.
- the highest level of community unacceptability for any advertisement shown in the research was 54%.
- the mediums of advertisements potentially providing children access to advertisements were a substantial source of concern for those ads with the highest levels of unacceptability.

## Research details about sections of the Code

### **Section 2.1 - discrimination and vilification**

The areas of discrimination and vilification (**section 2.1 of the Code**) provided results consistent with those of 2007. In 2012 only a small section of the community (28%) agreed with the Board that the use of a racial stereotype in what was intended as a humorous situation was a breach of the Code. There appears to be slightly more community concern (43%) about the humorous use of a religious reference which the Board considered not discriminatory.

### **Section 2.2 – violence**

With regards to violence (**section 2.2 of the Code**), Board and community views align fairly closely, although a low level of community concern (26%) about a radio advertisement which suggests that a woman hits her husband with a tool, can indicate that suggestions of violence have less impact and is not considered to be unacceptable.

### **Section 2.3 – sex, sexuality and nudity**

Sex, sexuality and nudity in advertising (**section 2.3 of the Code**) is still an issue of concern – although concern seems to have crystallised in relation to images available to children. In both 2007 and 2010 research indicated a level of concern in the community about sexualised images appearing where children can see them or of images which represent young looking women in sexually suggestive poses or wearing little clothing. This appears to still be a concern with the 2012 advertisements showing a low level of community concern (37%) about a PG rated advertisement showing a couple kissing passionately but the majority of the community (59%) finding the side of bus image of a woman lying on a fur rug wearing no top (but with no breasts visible) a breach of the Code.

### **Section 2.5 - language**

In 2007 community and Board views aligned closely around the use of language (**section 2.5 of the Code**). In 2007 both the Board and the community (58%) considered references to ‘fat arse’ were unacceptable, with both the Board and the community agreeing that the phrase ‘bloody idiot’ used by a child and a parent were acceptable. In 2012 however the Board’s decisions to dismiss complaints about the use of the terms ‘bullshit’, ‘wtf’ and an incompletely beeped out ‘fuck’ were all considered by the community (64%, 49% and 58% respectively) to be terms that breached the Code of Ethics. While the language tested in 2012 is objectively stronger than that tested in 2007, it does indicate that there is a level of community concern about language that the Board needs to consider.

### **Section 2.6 – health and safety**

Health and safety (**section 2.6 of the Code**) is an area of the 2012 research which also showed some interesting results. In 2007 the image of a child ironing her hair was considered by both the Board and the community to breach the Code. Similarly, both Board and community agreed that an over-the-top action adventure style advertisement showing a variety of illegal and unsafe activities was so fanciful that it did not breach the Code. There was not such a congruence of views in 2012.

## Social media – new issues tested

Two advertisements tested in 2012 concerned suggestions around the use of social media. One advertisement stated specifically that ‘stalking is a victimless crime’ and even though the statement was made in the context of facebook stalking, both the Board and the community (44%) considered that the complaints should be upheld. On the other hand, only 29% of the community agreed with the Board’s view that an advertisement depicting a man uploading images of a dog and tagging them as his friend’s girlfriend, was a depiction of behaviour contravening community standards on safety.