Case Report

Case number: 0259-26
Advertiser: Telstra
Medium: YouTube
Decision date: 21-Oct-2026
Decision: Breach
Action: Ad removed

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMUNITY PANEL

- AANA Code of Ethics - 2.3 Violence - breach
- AANA Code of Ethics - 2.5 Language - no breach
- AANA Code of Ethics - 2.6 Health and Safety - breach

AD DESCRIPTION

This YouTube campaign includes a 15-second and a 30-second ad.

In the 30-second ad, the alien leader with four arms arrives at a work-station where two other alien subordinates are working. As he arrives, the leader says 'Brian, a quick word'. While 'Brian' acknowledges his arrival and turns to face him, the leader slaps Brian against the head, and says, 'That's for when you tell me the evil we're about to release doesn't work.'

As Brian pushes the 'EVIL' button, the word 'EVILNESS' starts loading on the screen, but is stopped with a notice saying, 'BLOCKED TELSTRA NETWORK ENHANCED'. Brian reports, 'Sir, Telstra do blockie-blockie', at which point Brian's colleague slaps Brian against the back of his head. The leader notes, 'Failing is learning', and walks away, while Brian turns around and retaliates by slapping his colleague in the face.

The closing scene shows the view of earth from one of the spaceship's windows with advertiser's logo and the words 'wherever we go' shown on-screen.

The 15-second version shows the leader arriving, and 'Brian' pushing the button, after which the 'BLOCKED TELSTRA NETWORK ENHANCED' notice appears. Brian reports that 'Telstra do blockie-blockie', and his colleague slaps the back of his head. The leader comments, 'Failing is learning', and walks away as Brian retaliates by slapping his coworker in the face.

The closing scene shows the view of earth from one of the spaceship's windows with advertiser's logo and the words 'wherever we go' shown on-screen.





SUMMARY

Complaint

A complaint was received on the grounds that the ad depicts characters slapping each other, and creates the sense that this is acceptable behaviour.

Advertiser response

The advertiser responded that the portrayal was clearly stylised and fantastical, and would not be interpreted literally, and is unlikely to be copied. Even if the behaviour is considered to be 'violence', it is within the realm of space villains attempting to scam the earth, and get frustrated by Telstra's protection. In such an unrealistic scenario, the behaviour is relevant to the plot, and does not encourage members of the community to behave in a similar way.

While the ads make reference to 'EVIL' it is done within the clearly humorous and exaggerated context, and is unlikely to be seen as problematic language by the community.

A copy of the advertiser's full response is included as Appendix A.

Decisions

The Panel found that the ad was in breach of Section 2.3 of the AANA Code of Ethics, as the ad depicted unjustifiable violence.

The Panel found that the ad was not in breach of Section 2.5 of the AANA Code of Ethics, as the ad did not contain strong or obscene language.

The Panel found that the ad was in breach of Section 2.6 of the AANA Code of Ethics, as the ad depicted behaviour that was contrary to community standards on health and safety.

ASSESSMENT AND DECISIONS

Section 2.3 (AANA Code of Ethics): Advertising shall not present or portray violence unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised.

The Practice Note states:

> Section 2.3 prohibits the use of violent content unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised. Although the depiction of violence in an advertisement may be relevant to the story being told in the advertisement, any violence must also be justifiable in the context of the product being advertised, or else will be in breach of this section of the Code.

> More leeway is permitted where the depiction is stylised rather than realistic. However, advertisers should exercise caution when using cartoon violence as a cartoon style may be attractive to children.

Panel assessment

The Panel considered that societal attitudes on violence have changed, and that members of the community would likely consider the act of slapping someone to be an act of violence. The Panel also considered that in the 30 second ad, 'Brian' receives his first slap before even attempting to impress his leader, and is slapped against the back of his head by his colleague once the attempt to launch their scam fails. During the 15 second ad, 'Brian' receives a slap against the back of his head when his attempt to unleash 'EVILNESS' fails. In both versions, 'Brian' retaliates against his coworker by slapping him.

The Panel considered that the ads are clearly set in a fictional environment where aliens are attempting to scam people on earth, and that the violence shown was relevant to the story being told. However, the Panel considered that the violence portrayed, even if considered to be humorous, was not relevant in the context of the product being advertised. The Panel also considered that the violent behaviour was presented as a response to failure, suggesting that 'Brian' deserved to be slapped in this way.

Finally, the Panel considered that the ads feature aliens and strange creatures, and cartoon-style violence, which may attract the attention of children, and suggest that slapping someone when they fail at a task was appropriate.

Given that the violence depicted was unjustifiable in the context of the product being advertised, and because it was depicted in a way that may be attractive to children, the Panel found that the ads depicted unjustifiable violence.

Panel decision

The Panel, therefore, found that the ads breached Section 2.3 of the AANA Code of Ethics.

Section 2.5 (AANA Code of Ethics): Advertising shall only use language which is appropriate in the circumstances (including appropriate for the relevant audience and medium). Strong or obscene language shall be avoided.

The Practice Note states:

> Section 2.5 prohibits the use of strong or obscene language and requires that the language used in advertising must be appropriate for the circumstances. Words and phrases which are innocuous and in widespread and common use in the Australian vernacular are permitted provided they are used in a manner consistent with their colloquial usage, for example with gentle humour, and not used in a demeaning or aggressive manner.

Panel assessment

The Panel noted that the ads made reference to 'EVIL' and releasing 'EVILNESS' on the earth. The Panel considered that this wording was not used in an aggressive or demeaning manner, and would likely be perceived as innocuous and part of the everyday vernacular.

Panel decision

Accordingly, the Panel determined that the ad did not breach Section 2.5 of the AANA Code of Ethics.

Section 2.6 (AANA Code of Ethics): Advertising shall not depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.

The Practice Note states:

> Section 2.6 requires that advertising must not depict content that would encourage or condone unhealthy or unsafe behaviour having regard to Prevailing Community Standards.
>
> BULLYING The age of the people depicted in an advertisement, their relationship to each other and the nature of the communication are relevant in determining whether an advertisement constitutes bullying and is contrary to Prevailing Community Standards. More care must be taken when the people depicted in an advertisement are Minors or if there is an unequal relationship between the people in the advertisement, e.g. student and teacher, manager and worker.

Panel assessment

The Panel considered that the ads depicted 'Brian' as the recipient of unexpected, and unwanted slaps against the head or (in the case of the 30 second ad) a slap across the face. The Panel considered that such behaviour would be considered bullying and against community standards on health and safety.

The Panel also considered that the ads present the action of slapping someone as a reasonable or appropriate response to their failure, which is against community standards.

Panel decision

On this basis, the Panel found that the ads breached Section 2.6 of the AANA Code of Ethics.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The Panel found that the ads did not breach any other section of the relevant advertising codes.

ACTION

Thank you for your notification regarding the above cases and for your consideration of our response. We acknowledge the determination that the Double Brian 15-second and 30-second assets have been found in breach of Clauses 2.3 (Violence) and 2.6 (Health and Safety) of the AANA Code of Ethics. In response, we have taken action to remove ongoing activity of these assets.

APPENDIX A: ADVERTISER RESPONSE IN FULL

Re: Case 0259-26
I refer to your letters regarding a complaint received by the Advertising Standards Board about Telstra's recent Network Security Brand campaign.

Telstra ('We') is a voluntary member of the Advertising Standards Board and we take community standards very seriously. We take a lot of care to ensure that the preparation and publishing of our advertising material is not only compliant with the AANA Advertiser Code of Ethics ('Code') but that we set an industry standard.

We have provided the information requested in your letter below. We follow with responses to each of the parts of the Code to assist your panel's consideration of the advertisement. Our belief is that the complaints refer most particularly to an alleged breach of clause 2.3 of the Code and therefore, the other sections referenced are addressed in brief.

Description of the advertisement
The concept for this advertisement is a humorous demonstration of how Telstra's network security works to block nefarious cyber threats. The threats are personified by the Supreme Leader and his team of Zalunians, an alien species, in a fictional, fantastical world.
Majority of the complaints refer to the specific 30-second and 15-second "Double Brian" advertisements where the Supreme Leader approaches two alien characters at a control panel and, expecting another failed scam attempt, briefly slaps Brian on the head, saying, "that's for when you tell me the evil we're about to release doesn't work". Brian activates the scam sequence, which is then blocked by Telstra's network security. Following the failure, the second alien character slaps Brian on the back of the head, and Brian responds in kind. The advertisement then transitions to a view of Earth from the spaceship, with the Telstra logo and the "wherever we go" tagline displayed on screen.

Copy of scripts
We have attached a copy of the scripts with this response.
Details of CAD reference and CAD rating
1. Double Brian

ClearAds clearance:
Ratings: G

Please see below links for digital copies of the advertisements.
- 30" Double Brian: https://youtu.be/yvdBHMCg2co
- 15" Double Brian: https://youtu.be/IafN5U8Kzjc

Response to complaint according to AANA Code of Ethics

Clause 2.3 Violence

We submit that the advertisements do not breach clause 2.3 of the AANA Code of Ethics.

In considering clause 2.3, Telstra submits that the relevant scenes should be considered in the context of the advertisements as a whole, including their highly stylised and fantastical setting,

the fictional nature and characterisation of the participants, and the role those scenes play in communicating the advertised network-security proposition.

Double Brian - slapping
Whether the advertisement portrays violence:

Telstra's primary position is that, having regard to the manner and context in which the interactions are depicted, the brief and highly stylised slapstick interactions in Double Brian are not reasonably understood as a realistic portrayal of violence of the kind contemplated by clause 2.3. The interactions occur between fictional alien characters with an exaggerated and fantastical world and form part of the deliberately absurd and dysfunctional behaviour of the villain character. They are presented using the familiar conventions of slapstick comedy rather than as a realistic representation of interpersonal violence.

In making this submission, Telstra does not suggest that equivalent physical conduct between people in a real-world setting would be acceptable or without consequence. Rather, Telstra's submission concerns how the particular interactions are presented and reasonably understood within the fictional and exaggerated context of these advertisements.

Telstra also acknowledges that some complainants have perceived the conduct differently and are concerned that the advertisement depicts hitting in response to mistakes, including within a hierarchy, or may encourage children to imitate that conduct.

When the advertisement is considered as a whole, however, we do not consider that it presents the behaviour as appropriate real-world conduct or behaviour that views should emulate. The characters are engaging in the conduct are deliberately portrayed as villains attempting to perpetrate scams and cyber-attacks. Their behaviour is deliberately dysfunctional rather than admirable or aspirational.

Alternatively, if the Panel considers the interactions to constitute violence:

If the Panel nevertheless considers that the interactions constitute violence for the purposes of clause 2.3, Telstra submits that the depiction is justifiable in the context of the service being advertised.

The conduct is not presented independently of the advertising proposition. The campaign personifies cyber threats through fictional villains seeking to launch scams and cyber-attacks. Their frustration and exaggerated reactions arise as their attempts are repeatedly thwarted by Telstra's network security measures.

The behaviour therefore forms part of the creative device through which the advertisement communications the network-security proposition. It reinforces both the villainous nature of the would-be scammers and their frustration at being unable to overcome Telstra's network security.

Having regard to the brief and highly stylised presentation, the clearly fictional setting, the deliberate characterisation of those engaging in the conduct as villains, and the connection between their conduct and the network-security proposition being advertised, Telstra submits

that any depiction of violence is justifiable in the context of the service advertised and does not breach clause 2.3.

Children and general audiences:
Telstra acknowledges the concerns raised by some complainants about children viewing the advertisements, including concerns that children may be frightened by the characters or may imitate the slapping behaviour. We take those concerns seriously and do not seek to dismiss individual viewers' reactions.

The relevant conduct nevertheless occurs in a clearly fictional alien environment and is presented in an exaggerated and unrealistic manner. The characters engaging in the conduct are expressly portrayed as villains and the advertisements do not present their behaviour as appropriate real-world conduct.

We also note that the relevant advertisements received a G rating through the applicable advertising clearance process. Telstra relies on that classification as relevant contextual information rather than suggesting that it is determinative of the Panel's consideration under the Code.

For these reasons, Telstra submits that the advertisements do not endorse, encourage or normalise violence for children or other viewers.

Clauses 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7

Discrimination, vilification, exploitation or degradation:
The advertisements do not discriminate against or vilify any individual or group based on the attributes protected under the Code.

Sex, sexuality and nudity
The advertisements contain no sexualised content, nudity or sexual appeal, and do not depict or imply sex or sexuality in any form.

Language
The word "evil" is used as part of the fictional depiction of the alien characters as villains seeking to perpetrate cyber-attacks. It describes the characters' intended conduct and is consistent with their characterisation within the campaign.

The term "moron" is used once as an expression of frustration between fictional villain characters. Telstra acknowledges that some views may regard the term as impolite or insulting. However, it is not directed towards the audience or an identifiable individual or group and occurs within the exaggerated interactions between the fictional characters.

In that context, Telstra submits that the language does not breach clause 2.5 of the Code.

Health and safety
The advertisements do not present the behaviour of the villain characters as appropriate real-world behaviour or invite viewers to emulate that conduct.

Distinguishable as advertising

The advertisements are clearly distinguishable as advertising and directly promote Telstra's network-security capabilities, including through Telstra brand.

Conclusion

Telstra appreciates the concerns raised by the complainants and has considered them carefully.

For the reasons set out above, Telstra's primary position is that, when considered in the context and manner in which they are presented, the highly stylised and fantastical interactions are not violence of the kind contemplated by clause 2.3.

Alternatively, if the Panel considers that some or all of the relevant scenes do portray violence for the purposes of clause 2.3, Telstra submits that the nature of the depiction, its fictional and exaggerated context, the characterisation of those engaging in the conduct as villains, and its connection to the network-security proposition mean that the violence is justifiable in the context of the service advertised.

Telstra therefore submits that the advertisements do not breach clause 2.3 or the other relevant provisions of the Code.