



ADVERTISING  
STANDARDS  
BUREAU

# ASB Releases World First Research

New  
Findings

In a world-first, the Advertising Standards Bureau has conducted research to determine if its Board's decisions are in-line with prevailing community standards on advertising in Australia. Although many other countries support advertising self-regulatory systems, none have tested their Board's decisions against the views of their community.

The Advertising Standards Board has occasionally faced criticism that its decisions are out of step with prevailing community standards. The research examined the validity of these claims and demonstrated that they are generally unfounded.

The research was designed to survey and report on the decisions community members would have made on a range of advertisements across different media, including television, radio and print. All advertisements shown were the subject of complaints that had been before the Board.

## Methodology

The research was undertaken by Colmar Brunton Social Research.

The research involved 3 stages:

- 12 focus groups in capital cities and regional areas across the ACT, NSW, Victoria, and Queensland. Participants were shown 12 TV, radio and print advertisements.
- 4 online focus groups to cognitively test the online survey questions and gather further qualitative feedback. Respondents commented on 5 five advertisements.
- A national online survey of n=1263 respondents, also showing five advertisements.

The advertisements that participants were shown raised issues under the five main areas of the Code of Ethics. They were asked whether the advertisements should be shown, considered the Code of Ethics, and then asked again if, according to the Code, they thought the advertisement should be shown.

To ensure the survey results were representative of the target population, they were weighted using 2006 Census population information on age and gender within each State from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The Advertising Standards Bureau and Board welcomed the research findings which complement results from previous research. All members place great importance on keeping in touch with community attitudes and standards and recognise the need to test Board decisions.

The research demonstrated that Board decisions generally reflect community standards on the key provisions of the AANA Code of Ethics including portrayal of violence, use of language and health and safety.

However, there were two sections of the Code on which the Board and community opinion differed. The Board is out of step with the community who are more broadminded about politically incorrect statements when used with humour.

The research also suggests that when compared to the Board the community is more conservative in their attitude towards sex, sexuality and nudity.

Board members have embraced the community feedback and will be taking the results into account in their consideration of complaints under the Code from its next meeting. The Board has already discussed the need for its decisions to more accurately reflect the community's standards on advertisements that portray sex, sexuality or nudity.

The research also explored the factors that influenced respondents' decision-making process.

### The five main factors which influence the acceptability of advertising are:

- **Personal views or morals** – what community members perceive to be right or wrong.
- The extent to which an advertisement is perceived to be **relevant to the target audience** and the product or service.
- The extent to which **community members can relate to the scenario** depicted in the advertisement – the more they can relate to or sympathise with the situation the more likely they are to find it acceptable.
- The use of **humour** – community members tend to find advertisements that use humour more acceptable.
- **Timing** – the time of day or night an advertisement is played has an influence on its perceived acceptability.

Further findings of the research indicated that the Advertiser Code of Ethics could be improved in a number of minor ways. The ASB has provided this information to the AANA who are responsible for the wording of the Code.

### Community agreement with and support of the Code of Ethics

The research confirmed that there are high levels of public support for the concept of the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Code of Ethics, the system which administers it and for the specific sections of the Code.

Section 2.1 Discrimination:	agreement 81%
Section 2.2 Violence:	agreement 83%
Section 2.3 Sex, Sexuality and Nudity:	agreement 88%
Section 2.5 Language:	agreement 88%
Section 2.6 Health and Safety:	agreement 84%

This research forms part of the ASB's ongoing commitment to best practice in advertising self-regulation.

The ASB will undertake similar research every 2-3 years in order to gauge changes, if any, in community standards.

The research will also be used to inform the ASB's 2008 public education campaign with our focus clearly being on the ASB's role, accessibility and independence.