

Student 4: High Achieved
NZQA Intended for teacher use only

The leading function for the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is to keep control of advertising in New Zealand. The public may file a complaint at no fee and have the right to complain about any advertisement which they believe has breached the codes of practice. The ASA Chairman receives and reviews the written complaint, then establishes if the advertisement has possibly breached any codes. The Chairman's decision will be prescribed in writing the final decision of whether or not to make a media statement will be determined and published on the ASA website. ①

③ The first code I have chosen and identified states: "All advertisements should be prepared with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society." This code guarantees that advertisements are responsible for the messages they depict towards the public.

The effect of basic principle 4 (Code of Ethics) is that the advertisement has to be liable and cannot be irresponsible in what they portray to the public. This code is relevant to the complaint I have chosen because the complainant says: "I think this ad discriminates against vegetarian and makes fun of them". A duplicate complaint by T Hossack also shared similar view and says: "I'm concerned that this type of advertisement will represent a step backwards and reinforce the ignorant stereotypes which formed the basis of discrimination in the past." Both complaints are implying that the advertisement has been irresponsible and have breached this particular code by offending vegetarians. ④

This code exists to prevent offensive or insulting messages from being displayed to the public. Implications of this code of practice are that the public should not be offended by what they see in the advertisement that could be upsetting. ④ The advertisement was aimed at being entertaining, rather than offensive. This Basic Principle is relevant to the advertisement because the sausage/carrot and the voiceover could be considered offensive to vegetarians. ⑤

The second code (Code of People) I have chosen says "Advertisements should not portray people in a manner which is reasonably likely to cause to cause serious or widespread hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule." This principle ensures that advertisements should be responsible in the way they represent people. ③

④ The effect of this principle is that advertisements should represent people in a manner that would not cause hatred or misunderstanding, therefore acting in precaution of the public's wellbeing. In relation to the advertisement, the complaint said, "I think this ad discriminates against vegetarians and makes fun of them". This shows how the advert may have breached Basic Principle 2, by "portraying people in a manner which is reasonably likely to cause widespread hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule." This code exists so that advertisements do not offend the public in how they portray them. If this code were not to exist: there would be many issues and hostility. ⑥

② The advertisement I am writing about is titled "Foodstuffs (NZ) Limited", line sketch cartoon by Pak'n'Save supermarket. The advert consisted of a line sketch cartoon that began with the sign that said 'vegetarians' crossed out and a stick figure standing against a plain yellow background. The voiceover says, "ooh vegetarians look away. This commercial contains meat. Lots of it, because it's meat lovers' week at Pak'n'Save so there are huge savings on all things meaty." A selection of meat then passes by on a conveyor belt. The voiceover continues listing the meats and then states that vegetarian can 'look now' because there is a carrot. As the stick figure looked down the voiceover announces "Ha, sucked in, it's a sausage. Nice one."

M. McCafferty filed a complaint on the advert, briefly summarising the final part of the advert then stating, “There is an increased number of people within our society who have chosen not to eat meat and that is a valid choice. It is not ok to make fun of a group’s choice.” M. McCafferty then finishes by saying: “I think this ad discriminates against vegetarian and makes fun of them” which may breach Basic Principle 4 of the Code of Ethics and the Code for People in Advertising, Basic Principle 2, because this principle ensures that advertisements should be reasonable in the way they represent people. The advertisement may have breached this principle because M. McCafferty claimed the advert “made fun” of vegetarians. ④

② The Decision: While acknowledging the offence the advertisement caused to the complaint, the Chairman stated, “humour, albeit provocative, combined with the cartoon stick figure style of the advertisement, saved it from reaching the threshold to be likely to cause serious widespread offense” therefore saving it from causing contempt or ridicule to people that are on the grounds of vegetarians’ ethical beliefs and, therefore was not in breach of Basic Principle 2 of the Code for people in Advertising. After overlooking the complaint and noting that the advertisement was a promotion for meat lovers’ week at Pak’n’Save, the chairman decided, “that the advertisement had been prepared with a due sense of social responsibility and it was not in breach of Basic Principle 4 of the Code of Ethics”. The Chairman had a totally different opinion from and after totalling the decisions of both advertisements, she therefore made a final decision that overall, the Foodstuffs (NZ) Limited advertisement did not breach either of the Codes.

Wider Implications: Firstly, people choose to become vegetarian due to many “health benefits this lifestyle has to offer”. Being vegetarian also means you usually weigh less than people who eat meat. Secondly, being vegetarian has a positive effect on the environment. A couple of examples include: saving water (“excessive amounts of water are used in raising beef and other livestock.”) and participating in preventing global warming. This is because land is cleared for the purpose of raising cattle for consumption, and vegetarians do not have to worry about harming the environment in such way. Thirdly, vegetarians decide to take on a meatless lifestyle because of their care for animals. “Many people don’t want to eat something that had to die just so they could be nourished.” Lastly, we come to a global food shortage. The website explains that the amount of grain that is grown to feed cattle “could be used to feed starving nations.” I will conclude by using this quote from the website (although it mentions vegans, I think it is still completely relevant to this situation). “According to the vegan society, more than one third of the grain grown worldwide is fed to animals.” ⑦

⑥ I can understand where the complainant is coming from when they state that the advertisement “makes fun of vegetarians”. Personally, if I was vegetarian, I would be quite offended. There was no need to engage the viewers’ attention and then make a cheeky remark such as: “Ha, sucked in, it’s a sausage. Nice one.” I do find it rude, even though the advert is (and was regarded by the Chairman) as humorous. Although the ad has not breached the codes, I think that people become vegetarians for valid reasons and that should be accepted and respected by society, especially in the process of mass media such as advertisements. ⑦