

The Advertising Code of Practice provides rules for advertisers.

1 All advertisements in all media should comply with these codes, however, if a member of the public believes an advertisement has breached one or more of these codes, they may complain to the Advertising Standards Complaints Board (ASCB). The complaint is heard by the ASCB and there is a right of appeal to the Advertising Standards Complaints Appeal Board. If a complaint is upheld, the advertiser, agency and media are required to remove the advertisement. All decisions are made public via the ASA website.

The first advertisement and the associated complaint I have chosen to review advertises Ferrero Rocher chocolates. The advert features scenes of the Greek Gods of Olympus celebrating a secret known to them alone - Ferrero Rocher's chocolates. The "secret of the Gods" becomes known to humankind by accident when a chocolate "fell from the heavens" into a man's hand. People on Earth can now share in the "secret of gold." The complainant, M. Broughton, claims that the advert is "mocking and demeaning God." The complainant also believes that the advertisement will influence children's image of God explaining that as a Christian, "I find this commercial totally offensive. I feel that the commercial is mocking and demeaning God. Their commercials influence people's image of God, particularly children." The codes of practice the advertisement was said to have breached are Basic Principle 4 and Rule 5 of the Code of Ethics. 4

2 Basic Principle 4 states that "All advertisements should be prepared with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society." The intention of this code is to ensure that advertisers create advertisements that convey the relevant message without offending any member or members of the public.

The primary effect of the Principle is to keep advertisers in check with their commercials, so that they are not allowed to act irresponsibly or deliberately target groups or individuals in an offensive way. The principle exists to protect groups and individuals-such as members of specific religions, races or political beliefs-from offense, ridicule, racism, sexism etc. The principle implies that groups or individuals should not be disturbed or offended by advertisements. 3

In the case of M. Broughton's complaint regarding the Ferrero Rocher advertisement, the complainant implied that the advertisement was offensive to Christians by "mocking and demeaning God." By using the Gods of Olympus, Broughton believed that children's thought on God would be corrupted and distorted. The complainant believes that this advertisement has breached Basic Principle 4 by featuring Gods in a light-hearted manner. Broughton also suggests that Ferrero Rocher have been deliberately irresponsible in their advertising by using scenes featuring Gods. While this is a valid complaint, it is highly unlikely that the advertisement was made by creators knowingly seeking to offend. By using people who are portrayed as perfect, pure and god-like, Ferrero Rocher imply that their chocolates are eaten by the crème de la crème of society (i.e. the Gods), therefore one must purchase and eat these chocolates to be part of this 'elite group.' 4

2 Rule 5 in the Code of Ethics declares that "Advertisements should not contain anything which in the light of generally prevailing community standards is likely to cause serious or widespread offense taking into account the context, medium, audience and product (including services)." This rule limits advertisers, ensuring that what they show, represent, or hint at does not offend members of the public. The advertisement can make jokes, so long as the jokes are not made at the expense of a group or individual. This rule means that advertisers must keep in mind their audience. For example, if they are advertising a product to children, the advertisement would be quite different to if they were advertising to adults. It ensures that advertisers keep their audiences happy, rather than offended.

3 Rule 5 exists to prevent advertisers from phrasing or portraying their advertisements in a way that could be offensive to people. It requires advertisers to keep in mind what it is they are saying through the advertisement, both literally and in subtext.

Complainant M. Broughton, a Christian, declares that they find the Ferrero Rocher chocolate advertisement “totally offensive.” Because an individual found this advertisement offensive, it is theoretically a breach of Rule 5. However, advertisers have to think of the bigger picture, and not base their advertisements so that they can please every single minor group in society. Extremists, as M. Broughton could be called, are only a very small part of society. In the UK, there is a saying used in advertising that asks “Would it offend a man on an omnibus?” meaning, “Would it offend the average person?” If the advertisement would seem shocking or offensive to the average person, then it is not appropriate to be shown to the public. So, because the Ferrero Rocher advertisement only offended one individual who had taken an extreme interpretation of the advertisement, there is no clear breach of Rule 5. I agree with the decision, as opposed to the complainant, as I believe the advertisement was made simply to put the product in the best light they could think of. I do not think that the advertisers created the advertisement in such way that deliberately mocked the Christian God, or the gods of any other religions, for that matter. 5

4 Complainant M. Broughton believed the Ferrero Rocher chocolate advertisement to be offensive because it take a “mocking” approach to God. Although the Gods shown are purely fantastical and fictional, the complainant believes them to be “demeaning God: in their appearance and actions.” This can be connected to basic principle 4 because the principle involves “social responsibility”, meaning that advertisements must be created and publicised with a sense of responsibility to the feelings and beliefs of members of the public-the “men on an omnibus”. Broughton believes that the advertisement has been created without thought to - or with deliberate intent to offend - Christians and other people who follow God or gods. I, however, believe that the advertisement was not created with malicious intent, or with the purpose of mocking Christians and their beliefs. I think that the advertisement was merely created with the purpose of showing their product to be the very best on the market.

5 Society in general does not actually “demean” God in a way, on a daily basis. For example, they “breach” the Ten Commandments quite often, by doing such things as taking the Lord’s name in vain and working on a Sunday. So, it could be said that society in constantly “mocking and demeaning God”, even indirectly. However, in the advertisement, the advertisers did not intentionally mock God, or seek to offend and ridicule members of the Christian faith.

The Chairman’s decision that there were no grounds to proceed, saying that “nothing in the advertisement attacked Christianity or mocked the Christian God.” She said that “it was in his context of celebration and pleasure that the advertisement promoted the chocolates with a light- hearted story of how a pleasure fit for the Gods of Olympus was discovered by man.” When considering Broughton’s concern that the advertisement “influences people’s image of God, particularly children”, she said that the complainant had “taken an extreme interpretation” of an advertisement that the Chairman decided that the advertisement did not meet the threshold to be likely to cause serious or widespread offence and there was no apparent breach of the codes.