

Summary and ABAC response to the Review of ABAC Decisions Report

Introduction

Colmar Brunton Social Research undertook research in early 2013 to explore whether decisions made by the ABAC Complaints Panel are in-line with the view of community standards.

Ten (10) face-to-face focus groups along with an on-line survey of 1261 people tested 12 alcohol advertisements that had been subject to consideration by the Complaints Panel. Of those 12 advertisements, 7 complaints had been upheld, while 5 had been dismissed, by the Complaints Panel.

Key Findings

1. Prior to being exposed to the Code, only 2 of the 12 advertisements were considered unacceptable by the majority of respondents.
2. Overall, participants considered that the Complaints Panel had:
 - Correctly dismissed three (3) advertisements that were deemed acceptable by the community;
 - Correctly upheld complaints against three (3) advertisements that were deemed unacceptable by the community;
 - Conservatively upheld complaints against three (3) advertisements that were deemed acceptable by the community;
 - Dismissed a complaint against one advertisement that was deemed unacceptable.
 - Community opinions on 2 advertisements were evenly split with the Complaints Panel upholding a complaint about one advertisement while dismissing the other.
3. Knowledge of alcohol advertising regulation was low across all groups, but once prompted a majority (69%) were aware that they could complain to the Advertising Standards Bureau.
4. In the last 12 months, 66% of participants had no concern or offence about advertising standards in general.
5. The research found that 31% of respondents were not concerned about content about alcohol advertising, 35% were neither concerned nor unconcerned and 34% were concerned.

ABAC Response to the Research

- ABAC notes that the unprompted assessment of the 12 advertisements (2 of the 12 were found to be unacceptable) against the decisions of the Complaints Panel (7 of the 12 complaints were upheld) is a positive finding.
- ABAC notes that the ABAC Complaints Panel decisions are consistent, if not slightly conservative, in comparison to community standards.
- ABAC acknowledges the low awareness of alcohol advertising regulation in Australia and is currently assessing options available to improve the awareness of ABAC.
- ABAC will utilise the research to assist in a review of the Code that will commence later this year.

Background:

- The Code regulates the content of alcohol advertising and packaging in Australia and alcohol promotion at events. Subject to regular reviews, the Code reflects community expectations and changes in the media and advertising industries.
- An Alcohol Advertising Pre-vetting Service provides independent, confidential advice to advertisers on whether proposed advertisements comply with the Code. This service is offered on a 'user pays' basis.
- The ABAC Adjudication Panel, headed by the Chief Adjudicator, Professor, the Hon Michael Lavarch AO, considers public complaints about alcohol advertisements and packaging that fall within the jurisdiction of the Code. The Panel and its deliberations are independent of the Management Committee and the broader alcohol and advertising industry.
- In 2012, alcohol complaints represented 1.47% of all advertising complaints which is a drop from the average of 4% over the previous 5 years.