

COMPLAINT NUMBER	17/135
COMPLAINANT	G Zhang
ADVERTISER	Animates
ADVERTISEMENT	Animates Digital Marketing
DATE OF MEETING	8 May 2017
OUTCOME	No Grounds to Proceed

Advertisement: The Animates April 2017 Catalogue and Facebook and page, www.facebook.com/AnimatesNS/photos - shows an Asian man crouching by his sitting dog, with the slogan "Pets make us better people"

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Complainant, G Zhang, said: I was very offended by the attached Animates catalogue (April) that was delivered in my mailbox and also the present cover photo ad of Animates NZ's Facebook page. The front picture of the ad features a smiling Asian man petting a dog, along with the slogan "Pets make us better people". This can only imply that the man in the picture is usually not a good person, but his pet makes him better.. or tolerable. This ad is very negative. Why couldn't it have simply said - "Pets make us happier?" Subtle racism is the same as outright racism. I've lost count of the amount of times people have said "you are nice for an Asian", "you are good-looking for an Asian", and "you drive alright for an Asian" among many comments saying I'm not a true Kiwi because I look a certain way. This ad slogan offends me in the same way as those comments. Asians are so rarely cast in advertisements in NZ so writing such a slogan further emphasises their race. People naturally identify themselves socially, noticing similar qualities in themselves and people they see in ads. Why is it that when Asians are cast, it is in such negative advertisements, either implying they are bad people like this ad or ridiculing and mocking them like the 'spray and walk away' man. The basic principles of the Advertising Code of Practice state that Advertisements should not portray people in a manner which, taking into account generally prevailing community standards, is reasonably likely to cause serious or widespread offence on the grounds of their race. I was shown this advertisement by a few other Asian people who had all received this mailer. We were all very shocked that a family friendly pet store would be insensitive enough to print this ad. There is already a prevalent negative stereotype perpetuated in media and social media towards Asian people. This ad perpetuates the same idea. I am deeply surprised that Animates NZ would be so ignorant and foolish to think that this ad would not be perceived in this way. Could Animates NZ not think of ANY OTHER slogan? I would like this catalogue to be removed from animates.co.nz, the picture and accompanying slogan removed from their Facebook page and for Animates NZ to be more considerate in the future.

The relevant provisions were Code of Ethics - Basic Principle 4; Code for People in Advertising - Basic Principle 3.

The Chair noted the Complainant's concern that the advertisement portrayed a negative stereotype of the Asian community, implying that it is only the pet which makes the person in the advert 'better'.

Upon receiving the complaint, the Advertiser contacted the Secretariat to clarify the marketing concept. The 'Pets make us better people' is a campaign aimed at highlighting the benefits of pet ownership such as companionship, compassion and mindfulness.

The Chair noted the Advertiser stated they have a policy of using their own staff and pets when possible in their advertising, for authenticity purposes. The model in the advertisement was a staff member and chosen to represent the all-inclusive 'Kiwi-ness' of the Advertiser's message.

While acknowledging the offense the advertisement caused the Complainant, the Chair said the advertisement's message, when taken in context, was unlikely to cause serious or widespread offence to most people. The Chair ruled the advertisement had been prepared with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and there was no apparent breach of the Code of Ethics.

Accordingly, the Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Chair's Ruling: Complaint **No Grounds to Proceed**