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| COMPLAINT NUMBER | 18/080 |
| COMPLAINANT | A McLeod |
| ADVERTISER | Innerlife Church |
| ADVERTISEMENT | Innerlife Church Out of Home |
| DATE OF MEETING | 21 March 2018 |
| OUTCOME | No Grounds to Proceed |

Advertisement: The billboard advertisement for the Innerlife Church said “Tauranga Gospel Crusade – Miracles, Healing, Salvation. The Strand, Sat March 24th @7:30pm”. The advertisement featured the Advertisers name at the bottom of the advertisement.

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

Complainant, A McLeod, said: On Thursday morning, 8th March 2018, at 9:00am, I observed an offensive billboard (approximately A3 portrait sized) tied to a metal stake on the grass verge on the North East corner of the roundabout at the intersection of Levers Road, Ngatai Road and Otumoetai Road in Tauranga. The placard was promoting a "TAURANGA GOSPEL CRUSADE" promising "MIRACLES", "HEALING", "SALVATION", promoting an event in Tauranga on Saturday 24th March 2018.

The event is being promoted by InnerLife Church, 61 Maleme St. Tauranga, New Zealand 3112.

It was similar to the image attached except it also featured the InnerLife Church logo.

Firstly, the advertisement is offensive as it indicates that miracles will happen, which is a claim that is not supported by any credible scientific evidence.

It also indicates that attendees will be healed, which is a therapeutic or health claim not supported by medical evidence.

Its claims fall within the definition of “Therapeutic Purpose as provided by The Medicines Act: "preventing, diagnosing, monitoring, alleviating, treating, curing, or compensating for, a disease, ailment, defect, or injury; or influencing, inhibiting, or modifying a physiological process...."

Rule 1(b) of the Therapeutic and Health Advertising Code states that advertisements shall not contain any claim, statement or implication that the service advertised; are effective in all cases, are infallible, unailing, magical, miraculous, or that it is a certain, guaranteed or sure cure. This advertisement does exactly that.

The advertisement breaks Rule 2(a) of the Therapeutic and Health Advertising Code which states that advertisements shall be accurate. Statements and claims shall be valid and shall be able to be substantiated. Substantiation should exist prior to a claim being made. This is not the case for this organisation’s claims.

Secondly, the event title, "Gospel Crusade", is offensive. By definition a gospel crusade is "a vigorous campaign for...religious change". The word "Crusades" most commonly refers to the violent military expeditions, beginning in the late 11th century, that were organised by western European Christians against Muslims. I believe this title will be offensive to Muslims,

and I found it particularly offensive as we live in a modern society that rejects the imperialistic arrogant attitude this advertisement promotes. Modern society rejects imperialism and colonisation, particularly using any type of force or manipulation -- whether that be physical or (in this case) psychological.

The word Salvation is offensive. This church is promoting the idea that people need to be saved and that the only way for a person to be saved is through their particular god. The word "Salvation" logically creates a division between those who are "saved" and "unsaved". It implies that those who don't agree and believe will otherwise face something that they need salvation from -- and given this church is promoting an evangelistic "crusade", and given the beliefs it publishes on its website, it is reasonable to assess that the salvation they are advertising is from perishing and/or hell.

The concept of people being subjected to any kind of punishment for simply not believing in one group's ideology is immoral.

Therefore, by using the word "Salvation", this advertisement is playing on fear without justifiable reason -- exploiting the superstitious.

This church, by advertising "MIRACLES", "HEALING" , and "SALVATION" -- unsubstantiated by any credible evidence -- is therefore not providing an honest advertisement of what is really being offered -- which is has been separately advertised as singing, preaching, and prayer (i.e. petition to a deity whose existence is unproven). It is not truthful, nor balanced but rather it is misleading.

This advertisement breaks rule 1(c) of the Therapeutic and Health Advertising Code which states that advertisements should not portray unrealistic outcomes or prey on or misrepresent vulnerable audiences (e.g. sick, elderly, pregnant women, overweight people).

This advertisement breaks the basic advertising principles as it has not been prepared with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society. This advertisement is likely to create false hope to those viewing this advertisement, and this is psychologically abusive to those in our community who are sick, elderly (who are more likely to have health issues), vulnerable, weak, or in need. Those people should instead be referred to a healthcare professional -- whether their General Practitioner to receive professional care, and/or a psychologist or psychiatrist to receive appropriate treatment. By not providing any disclaimers or responsible health recommendations, this church is neglecting its duty within our community.

The relevant provisions were Code of Ethics - Basic Principle 4, Rule 11, Rule 2;

The Chair noted the Complainant's concern the advertisement was misleading and offensive as it made unsubstantiated claims about miracles, healing and salvation and used the words "gospel crusade" which implied violence.

The Chair said the Advertiser had clearly identified itself as a church by including the name 'Innerlife Church' at the bottom of the advertisement. The Chair considered the advertisement met the requirements for an advocacy advertisement under Rule 11 of the Code of Ethics. Rule 11 states:

"Advocacy Advertising - Expression of opinion in advocacy advertising is an essential and desirable part of the functioning of a democratic society. Therefore such opinions may be robust. However, opinion should be clearly distinguishable from factual information. The identity of an advertiser in matters of public interest or political issue should be clear."

Also applicable were the Advocacy Principles, developed by the Complaints Board in previous Decisions for the application of Rule 11. These said:

1. That section 14 of the Bill of Rights Act 1990, in granting the right of freedom of expression, allows advertisers to impart information and opinions but that in exercising that right what was factual information and what was opinion, should be clearly distinguishable.
2. That the right of freedom of expression as stated in section 14 is not absolute as there could be an infringement of other people's rights. Care should be taken to ensure that this does not occur.
3. That the Codes fetter the right granted by section 14 to ensure there is fair play between all parties on controversial issues. Therefore in advocacy advertising and particularly on political matters the spirit of the Code is more important than technical breaches. People have the right to express their views and this right should not be unduly or unreasonably restricted by Rules.
4. That robust debate in a democratic society is to be encouraged by the media and advertisers and that the Codes should be interpreted liberally to ensure fair play by the contestants.
5. That it is essential in all advocacy advertisements that the identity of the advertiser is clear.

The Chair noted the words 'miracle', 'healing', 'salvation' and 'crusade' which featured on the Innerlife Church advertisement were terms with multiple meanings, particularly for people with faith. Whilst acknowledging the Complainant's interpretation of the advertisement, the Chair said the advertisement did not meet the threshold to be likely to mislead or offend most consumers.

The Chair said the advertisement did not make any explicit reference to therapeutic or health claims and as such she ruled the Therapeutic and Health Advertising Code referenced by the Complainant did not apply to the advertisement before her.

The Chair said the advertisement had been prepared with a due sense of social responsibility and confirmed the advertisement did not breach Basic Principle 4 or Rules 2 and 11 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

APPEAL INFORMATION

According to the procedures of the Advertising Standards Complaints Board, all decisions are able to be appealed by any party to the complaint. Information on our Appeal process is on our website www.asa.co.nz. Appeals must be made in writing via email or letter within 14 days of receipt of this decision.